Stevenson, Frye, and the Structure of Romance

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Abstract of Thesis

This thesis looks at the work of Robert Louis Stevenson in the context of Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes and at the operations of the conventions of romance in relation to structuralist and post-structuralist theories of narrative. It proposes the unsustainability of the traditional or institutionalised model of romance provided by Frye and considers, through Stevenson's essays and fictions, the development of romance as a modern idiom. Using Frye's ideas as a basis for further study, this thesis seeks to demonstrate that romance is a progressive rather than conservative mode of fiction. Through the ideas expressed by Stevenson in his various guises as an author and theorist, it presents a theory of romance as a genre in which the functions of narrative undergo their most radical shifts and deviations from the conventional bases of form.

Following the lead of his essays, it is shown that Stevenson's romances deliberately set in motion a system of conventional elements which, while they produce a dynamic narrative structure, tend also to exceed the sustainable limits of the structures they are engaged in. By no means aimless, these activities represent an attempt by Stevenson to recreate 'the certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man'* which, he says, occasion the formation of romance, but which are paradoxically incompatible with the logical conditions of romance as a conventional mechanism. Consequently, it is demonstrated that, if Frye represents the culmination of romance as a 'tradition' (or a point at which the structure of romance can be audited and catalogued *as* a tradition), Stevenson, acting prior to Frye, represents a point at which the underlying assumptions of this tradition are preclusively denied.

* Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', *Memories and Portraits* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), p. 174.

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Abbreviations

Frequently cited texts are abbreviated as follows and the page references appear in the body of the thesis:

SS Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1976)

AC Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990)

HR Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', *Memories and Portraits* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912)

GR Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', *Memories and Portraits* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912)

NR Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism', *Essays Literal and Critical* (London: Tusitala Edition, 1923)

Introduction

This thesis looks at the work of Robert Louis Stevenson in the context of Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes and at the operations of the conventions of romance in relation to structuralist and post-structuralist theories of narrative. It proposes the unsustainability of the traditional or institutionalised model of romance provided by Frye and considers, through Stevenson's essays and fictions, the generic development of romance as a modern idiom. Using Frye's ideas as a basis for further study, this thesis will seek to demonstrate that romance is a progressive rather than conservative mode of fiction, in the sense that it refuses to inhabit with any degree of stability the kind of model offered by Frye, a model which has assumed a position of continued critical orthodoxy, but which fails to account for the full possibilities of romance as exampled by an author like Stevenson. More broadly speaking, it may then become possible to offer, through the ideas expressed by Stevenson in his various guises as an author and theorist, a more accurate theory of romance as a genre in which the functions of narrative undergo their most radical shifts and deviations from the conventional bases of form.

This is to imply, firstly, that Frye's writings on romance occupy a position of authority which has remained largely unchallenged in the event of subsequent criticism. This, of course, is not true of Frye's theories as a whole, which, for one reason or another, have become unfashionable and outmoded. In dealing specifically with romance, however, Frye's ideas - as expressed in *Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance* - represent the most

extensive and comprehensive to date. If no longer accepted as an 'authority', Frye is arguably the most significant figure among those critics who have attempted to develop a theory of romance which has enabled us to determine its location and function within the canon. While this thesis seeks to demonstrate the extent of Stevenson's contributions to a treatise of fiction which accentuates the importance of romance, it recognises (in advance) that even he, in spite of his successes, failed to convince his peers and successors of the essential merits of romance fiction. This is hardly surprising given the critical attitude that prevailed in the period immediately during and after Stevenson. As Ian Duncan's brief account suggests, the critical status of fiction throughout the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries tended towards an exclusion of romance as a viable medium:

> Victorian cultural critics officially ignored or condemned the novel for its status as an entertaining illusion... Those essayists and reviewers who did write about fiction occupied themselves with Aristotelian canons of mimetic probability. The narrative projects of high modernism claimed aesthetic dignity by repudiating that Victorian fiction that had sold itself to a mass reading public. When the novel was ushered into the academic precincts of critical thought by F. R. Leavis, it was on the strength of a high seriousness residing in social and psychological mimesis alone...[1]

It is Frye who, in the aftermath of Leavis, injects some credibility into a genre too often misrepresented as 'wish-fulfilment literature'[2] or as the fictional mainstay not of a great but, as Leavis put it, of 'a bad tradition'.[3] And it is here we can begin to gauge the full extent of Frye's essential contribution to a contemporary understanding of romance and begin to establish the reasons why he is essential to this thesis.

Writing as late as the mid-1970s, Frye still felt the need to remind us of the misleading influence of Leavis' legacy and was inclined to warn that the 'prevailing

conception of serious fiction is enshrined in the title of F. R. Leavis' book *The Great Tradition*'. The critical dictum stood, as far as Frye could see, that the

> ...serious literary artists who tell stories in prose... also tell us something about the life of their times, and about human nature as it appears in that context, while doing so. Below them comes romance, where the story is told primarily for the sake of the story. This kind of writing is assumed to be much more of a commercial product, and the romancer is considered to have compromised too far with popular literature. Popular literature itself is obviously still in the doghouse.
>
> This means that what gives a novelist moral dignity is not the story he tells, but a wisdom and insight brought to bear on the world outside literature, and which he has managed to capture within literature.[4]

The 'difference' between serious and non-serious fiction is the same as the 'difference' between realism and romance, says Frye, and it is with this in mind that he constructed his 'secular scripture' in an attempt to reconcile the disparities and biases within and around fiction.[5]

Whatever its strengths or weaknesses, *The Secular Scripture* (and the *Anatomy* that came before it) issued a necessary challenge to a critical hegemony that diminished our appreciation of romance by insisting upon an institutional denial of popular modes. For it is the sheer popularity of romance, Frye argues, that 'raises a good many questions about common critical assumptions about fiction which have been fostered by the prestige of a displaced and realistic tradition' (*SS*, p. 43). Whatever the processes involved in dissolving the Leavisite 'myth of literary privilege', Frye's promotion of romance from a second to first division of literary activity has certainly contributed to the elimination of 'a special category of works designated as Literature, within which an even more privileged group of works was set apart and conscientiously re-edited, reinterpreted, and taught'.[6] And while, as Howard Felperin explains, 'the dominant schools of contemporary criticism -

marxism, structuralism, and deconstruction - have converged upon this myth, and in dismantling it of its idealist and metaphysical yearnings and trappings, its Arnoldian inheritance of displaced religion, have inevitably raised another set of questions',[7] we would do well to acknowledge, like Felperin, the part played by 'Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*, with its promise of systematic totalization', which ensured that the 'idea of a canon of literature, for so long the unquestioned pretext and justification for all this questionable activity, now came into question'.[8]

It was in taking this stance that Frye produced one of his most enduring contributions to our understanding of fiction in advancing the relevance of romance as the definitive principle of fiction, where it not only denotes a particular literary form but, as Gillian Beer suggests, 'a literary quality' that 'is frequently set against "reality" in literary argument'.[9] This subsidiary definition of romance was radically extended by Frye who went so far as to reverse the canonical designation of fiction as a strictly representational medium, so much so that Frye's negation of mimesis as a workable method and the identification of romance as the conceptual determinant of fiction have gained a widespread critical currency. As Ian Duncan concurs:

> Romance is the essential principle of fiction: its *difference* from a record of "reality", of everyday life. A novel could describe, by metonym and metaphor, the shape of the world and everything in it; it could also narrate its historical formation through time. The modern formation of concepts of society and culture coincides with the great age of the novel in nineteenth-century Britain. But even as the novel began to totalize its mimetic range it reasserted fiction, not mimesis, as its critical principle, in an elaborate commitment to plot. Fiction in these novels is the effect above all of plot, conspicuous as a grammar of conventions, that is, a shared cultural order distinct from material and historical contingency. To read a plot - to take part in its work of recognition - is to imagine a transformation of life and its conditions, and not their mere reproduction. Such is the rhetorical definition of romance by its modern day theorists, Northrop Frye and Frederic Jameson, and such is the rhetorical agenda of the great Victorian social novels. The old commonplace of an antithetical

> relation between romance and reality, invoked by the novel in its own apologies of origin, produces a new, dialectical figure of romance as the fulcrum against which - positioned on its edge, between inside and out - reality can be turned around.[10]

In spite of Frye's efforts, however, there has existed a deal of confusion as regards the 'statuses' of fiction. As Ian Duncan goes on: '...criticism has continued to find an innate contradiction between the ambitions of an "authentic" social representation and the elements of romance, those forms whose appearance measures the difference between novel and reality'.[11] It is apparent that while we have eradicated the myths of privilege surrounding fiction, we have instilled instead a myth of priorities, or, at least, a myth of differences which continues to obscure, and probably diminish, our critical absorption and acceptance of romance as a worthwhile medium.[12]

Frye's answer to this, as the title of his treatise suggests, comes through an emphasis on the structural operations of fictional narratives which, when reduced to their basic structural compounds and uniform levels of plot, reveal a trans-literary network of recurrent functions, or conventions, which Frye and others, like Robert Graves and Joseph Campbell,[13] have characterised as 'archetypes'. It is important to grasp the extent of Frye's insistence on structure as the great leveller of existing fictional modes: to dissolve the representational excesses that signal a narrative's particular formation in (historical and cultural) space and time is to reveal an encoded series of archetypes which initiate and complete the internal transactions of literary form, prior to, during and after the prevailing historical and cultural conditions within which a narrative is conceived. Accordingly, it becomes possible to trace, as will be explained more fully in the first section of this thesis, a structural

unity between narratives as diverse as Homer's *The Odyssey* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Within this formal arena, the genre of romance occupies a special place of narrative neutrality, acting as an archetypal plenum towards which the conventions of narrative most actively refer: 'Archetypal criticism seems to find its center of gravity in the mode of romance ... which affords an unobstructed view of archetypes'.[14] Romance affords an unobstructed view, says Frye, because it is 'formulaic, and the formulaic unit, of phrase or story, is the cornerstone of the creative imagination, the simplest form of what I call an archetype' (*SS*, p. 36). Frye's entire programme is based on the assumption that the whole of western literature is embedded in the kind of archetypal formulae made explicitly visible in romance. As he puts it himself:

> It is clear ... that archetypes are most easily studied in highly conventionalized literature: that is, for the most part, naive, primitive and popular literature. In suggesting the possibility of archetypal criticism, then, I am suggesting the possibility of extending the kind of comparative and morphological study now made of folk tales into the rest of literature. (*AC*, p. 104)

The full possibilities of archetypal criticism can be realised if we adhere to Frye's principle of 'displacement', which refers to the developmental adjustments of literary form as it undergoes, through time, an increased correspondence to external contingencies:

> In the course of struggling with a world which is separate from itself, the imagination has to adapt its formulaic units to the demands of that world, to produce what Aristotle calls the probable impossibility. The fundamental technique is what I call displacement, the adjusting of formulaic structures to a roughly credible context. (*SS*, p. 36)

Looking at western literary history as a whole, as Frye does, the process of displacement is simultaneous with a more general shift in ideas about what is credible or not and, broadly speaking, can be said to reflect the gradual subordination of religious or superstitious belief-systems to the burgeoning influence of the empirical sciences. A pattern emerges in the development of fictional modes where, 'Myths of gods merge into legends of heroes; legends of heroes merge into plots of tragedies and comedies; plots of tragedies and comedies merge into plots of more or less realistic fiction' (*AC*, p. 51). For Frye, the mimetic tendency is really an organic modification of narrative 'structure to a demand for greater conformity to ordinary experience' (*SS*, p. 39); though, crucially, it reflects changes 'of social context rather than literary form', while 'the constructive principles of story-telling remain constant through them, though of course they adapt to them' (*AC*, p. 51). The penchant for realism in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries is a case in point. Against the epistemological backdrop of the empirical sciences, says Frye, 'the prestige of "realism" in the nineteenth century reflected the prevailing fashions of that culture, nearly all of which emphasized some form of correspondence, the paralleling of mental structures with something in the outer world' (*SS*, p. 45).

The implications of an archetypal reading are such that 'realism' is exposed as a technical effect, rather than an efficacious method, succeeding only inasmuch as it conforms to a society's tenets of plausibility: even so, it is always rooted in and unable to disengage from the conventional apparatuses of literary form that necessitate the estrangement of literature from any external foundation, so that romance remains, as Duncan has explained, the fundamental principle of fiction. 'Realism', in this sense, merely subordinates the conventional mechanisms of

structure (made visible by romance) under a minutia of descriptive and discursive detail. Such detail, when subject to the penetrating gaze of the archetypal critic, superfluously conceals the same conventional mechanisms at work in the most formulaic romances.[15] Realism, then, is a generic slight of hand. It merely disguises its archetypal fundament under an extraneous material and produces an effect of reality through an implied correspondence between the fictional world and the perceived 'laws of life'.[16]

Ultimately, for Frye, this leads to the negation of value-based criteria as a means of segregating types of fiction, such as those applied by Leavis. The terms 'realism' and 'romance' can now be seen as two extremes acting within the same sphere of unreality (fiction); and this is a principle which Frye is repeatedly at pains to stress: 'The words "romantic" and "realistic"... as ordinarily used, are relative or comparative terms: they illustrate tendencies in fiction, and cannot be used as simply descriptive adjectives with any sort of exactness' (*AC*, p. 49). The 'mimetic tendency itself, the tendency to verisimilitude and accuracy of description, is one of the two poles in literature' (*AC*, p. 51), says Frye, the other being the anti-representational tendencies of romance: 'One direction is called "romantic," and the other "realistic." The realistic tendency moves in the direction of the representational and the displaced, the romantic tendency in the opposite direction, concentrating on the formulaic units of myth and metaphor' (*SS*, p. 37). Or, to put it another way, on 'one extreme of literature we have the pure convention', which pertains to romance; while, on the other, 'we have the pure variable, where there is an attempt at novelty or unfamiliarity, and consequently a disguising or complicating of archetypes' (*AC*, p. 103).

The implications and complexities of this will be examined in the next chapter. Likewise, Frye's theory of archetypes, which includes his theory of romance, will be studied in more detail in the following chapter, which will also provide a provisional summary of romance in a very general sense. In the meantime, we notice that it is a consequence of Frye's theory that all narratives, in being elaborations of, rather than departures from, the universality of form, are the offspring of romance, which Frye has located, in turn, as the offspring of myth, so that all narratives are ultimately the offspring of 'myth and romance [which] both belong in the general category of mythopoeic literature' (*AC*, p. 188). But while there has been a widespread acceptance among critics of certain aspects of Frye's anatomy, we know, since Foucault and Derrida, that these kinds of totalisations are no longer possible and that, as will be shown in time, the archetypal schema is dependent upon a range of assumptions that are no longer sustainable in view of current critical trends.

There are, though, several reasons as to why Frye's theories remain important to this thesis, as they do to any study of romance. As suggested, Frye is one of the most significant romance-theorists of the twentieth-century. It is arguable, moreover, that archetypal criticism, while failing to sustain a theory of the universality of form, is nevertheless useful in that it provides us with an accurate grounds for the study of romance. Romance, after all, is widely conceived to be formulaic. Frye's theories, we might argue, are sustainable so long as they pertain to formulaic narratives and to myth and romance in particular. Indeed, in theorising romance, Frye has shaped, or has simply confirmed, the perception of romance that continues to inhabit our critical consciousness - that romance, by definition, is a highly conventionalised and

formulaic genre. This is evidenced when, say, Wallace Martin, in his critique of the limited applicability of structuralism, takes it for granted that, while modern fictions resist the conditioning of form, popular or traditional modes of fiction are inherently formulaic and may continue, therefore, to fall under the various methodologies of structuralist criticism:

> Although popular fiction remains formulaic, novels and short stories have for a century tended increasingly not just to deviate from traditional formulae but to deride them, and there is little hope of discovering an underlying set of structural principles in texts that so obviously confute our zeal for regularity.[17]

Martin is quick to concede that, where popular fiction is concerned, the tendency towards regularity is almost mandatory. He is, then, at least half-way to agreeing with Frye, differing only, if crucially, in that he advocates a rupture, which Frye denies, between traditional and modern modes of fiction. If we accept that Martin is giving us an accurate summary of the most *Recent Theories of Narrative*, as the title of his book suggests, then it becomes clear that Frye remains useful in offering a basis, if not for the study of 'deviant' strains of fiction, then assuredly for the study of 'traditional formulae'. If we accept, meanwhile, that the conventions inherent in traditional formulae exist - the recurring functions, images, symbols, tropes and motifs that can be catalogued *as* conventions - then Northrop Frye's summation of literary modes remains a plausible criterion for literary analysis.

Martin's tone is such, however, that we begin to wonder whether Frye's analysis does justice to the genre he is attempting to exonerate from negative evaluations. There is a sense in which Frye has merely replaced the institutionalised attitude towards fiction that distinguished between serious realism and frivolous

romance with an institutionalised model of romance that, in the end, only confirms our worst suspicions. To emphasise 'the uniformity of romance formulas over the centuries' (*SS*, p. 6), we might say, is to play into the hands of those who would prefer to see it expelled from the canon. The effect of Frye's insistence on uniformity is to present romance as a cut and dried phenomenon: in the end, it is critically accountable and, therefore, critically expendable. If romance is everything Frye says it is, then there is no need to analyse its function further; its critical value is exhausted, which is perhaps why romance has often been regarded as having no critical value at all. The point is substantiated by Frye's insistence on the sheer simplicity of romance - and the absence, within it, of any aporetic tensions or ambiguities - as its main source of appeal. Romance, he says, has a

> ...tendency to split into heroes and villains. Romance avoids the ambiguities of ordinary life, where everything is a mixture of good and bad, and where it is difficult to take sides or believe that people are consistent patterns of virtue or vice. The popularity of romance, it is obvious, has much to do with its simplifying of moral facts. It relieves us from the strain of trying to be fair-minded, as we see particularly in melodrama, where we not only have outright heroism and villainy but are expected to take sides, applauding one and hissing the other ... If we ask why such a story as the Apollonious romance was so popular, one answer is that a sequence of archetypes, traditional fictional formulas or building blocks, has an interest in itself, however poor the logic or "hence" narrative connecting them might be. (*SS*, p. 50)

So it is with Frye that romance is made to sound like pantomime. It is formulaic to the point of consisting of little more than perfunctory functions, so much so, in fact, that it appears to be functionally redundant. Frye tells us what discerning critics like Wallace Martin have always suspected about romance, that it is predictable, insipid, repetitive, lacking relevance and ingenuity. He galvanises the orthodox opinion of romance as an intensely conservative, formulaic mode of narrative which inhibits or,

in its most conventional sense, prohibits the development of narrative form. As for Frye's claim that a sequence of archetypes has an interest in itself - we might stress again that, in the aftermath of texts like Frye's *Anatomy* or Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, our interest in formulae is nowadays negligible, a settled affair, a closed chapter in the history of the critical inquest.

In mounting a sophisticated defence of romance, Frye delivers all the reasons as to why it needs defending in the first place. We could even say that if romance is still in the doghouse there is a sense in which Frye himself is to blame. It is arguable, above all, that Frye's prevalence in this field has inhibited any attempt to discover and implement a theory of romance as a modern phenomenon. Of course, Frye would undoubtedly argue, and does, that the structural simplicity of romance is its strength and that to place a negative value on simplicity (or, vis-à-vis, a positive value on ambiguity) would mean a return to the Leavisite way of thinking. That may be true. What is misleading, however, is the suggestion that all romances, by definition, should somehow fit these primal designations of form without showing any measure of generic rupture or mutation, or without revealing any structural malformations against the static organicity of the 'tradition' they belong to.

This thesis argues that, when we look at the work of a writer like Stevenson, it becomes necessary to readjust our conception of formulaic structures. Some of Stevenson's fictions are, quite deliberately, intensely formulaic. But by examining how they work formulaically and by exploring the conditions according to which they function as structures, we can begin to unravel some of the assumptions, consolidated by Frye, about the function of romance as a formulaic genre. One such assumption, which Stevenson quite deliberately refutes, rests on the unquestioned

acceptation of formulae as stable, regular and functionally compact, as phenomena that resurface throughout the generic field of romance with behavioural exactitude and constancy.[18] Formulae, critics assume, are uncomplicated inasmuch as they are easily accessible to the lucid methodologies of a 'science' of literature. But if we are talking about a science of literature, as formalists and structuralists often do, then why not talk of literary formulae as we might of chemical formulae, wherein constituent elements are capable of the mutation and disintegration of structure, or where the functional ingredients may prove reactionary and incendiary rather than passive and integral? Or why not think of a 'quantum' level of narrative activity that reveals unstable processes 'always already' at work within 'structures', or of authors, like Stevenson, who might seek to exploit these processes in order to produce new or unrealised effects?

Accepting Frye's theory of archetypes as a basis for the study of romance gives us a more than adequate platform, the most adequate, probably, to date. The fact that this is the most adequate platform, however, is symptomatic of the need for romance to be re-evaluated and re-reasoned in view of its generic development in the modern epoch. Yet again, there are grounds for claiming that romance needs to be re-reasoned in terms of how, in itself, it contributes to the development of modern fiction and how, in itself, it impacts on the development of modern theories of narrative. By foregrounding Stevenson's version of romance against Frye's, it is possible, precisely, to formulate a theory of the structure of romance that, while it often coincides with a structuralist agenda, as often supersedes it. (Glenda Norquay, for one, has noted some areas in Stevenson's essays where he begins to 'touch on a surprising number of issues which have concerned practitioners and theorists of the

novel in recent years ...').[19] While Frye, ostensibly, offers a reliable model of romance in relation to its status as an immutable generic preserve, Stevenson demonstrates, to the contrary, that romance is a genre in which narrative makes its most significant advances. Frye marvels over, and extols, the uniformity of romances. In this thesis, I wish to take a converse position by suggesting, through Stevenson, that romance is an area of fiction where narrative undergoes some of its most innovative and ground-breaking violations of form. It is the overriding aim of this work, meanwhile, to concentrate on structure and on the conventional elements of structure, those areas of narrative, according to Frye, that uphold the generic constancy of romance over time, with the intention of revealing how Stevenson initiates the collapse of romance as a conventional mechanism. This thesis will show that, unlike Stevenson, Frye fails to address the possibility of a modern romance which disengages itself from its traditional bases by detaching itself from the structural prerequisites that characterise its function.

To put these suggestions in a broader context, I wish to argue that, while romance demonstrates certain principles and effects we tend to associate with a formalist or structuralist programme, it as equally demonstrates those principles or effects that we associate with a post-structuralist programme. Romance has proven vital to our understanding of formalist and structuralist theory because it so clearly reveals the operations of structure. It is a generic category, as Boris Eichenbaum points out in his 'Introduction to the Formal Method', that 'bares its construction'.[20] But, by the same token, it also bares those areas wherein we detect its deconstruction: it demonstrates, more effectively than any other type of fiction, the conventional functions of structure and, by that very logic, demonstrates more

effectively the failure of structure, as well as the failure of formalism and structuralism as valid means of interpretation. In view of this, it is one of the aims of this thesis to give a structuralist reading of Stevenson's fiction in order to show the failure of structuralism; for it is the case, with Stevenson, that where texts are liable to deconstruct themselves they are actively made to do so.

At the same time, post-structuralism itself has generally failed to address the issue of conventional structures where they are most readily perceived to exist. It is the tendency among those engaged, for example, in deconstructive practices to focus on the work of Mallarmé or Joyce, authors who demonstrate perfectly the volatility of linguistic systems, and to neglect those texts where structure appears rigidly intact. It is one of my aims to redress this imbalance and to show that, even where structure appears intact and regular, it is nevertheless bound to produce instances or, in Stevenson's case, organised sequences of structural 'entropy'. What is remarkable about Stevenson's romances, as I intend to show, is that they deliberately set in motion a system of conventional elements which, while they produce a dynamic narrative structure, tend also to exceed the sustainable limits of the structures they adhere to. By no means aimless, these activities represent an attempt by Stevenson to recreate 'the certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man'[21] which, he says, occasion the formation of romance, but which are paradoxically incompatible with the logical conditions of romance as a conventional mechanism. Consequently, it will be demonstrated in this thesis that, if Frye represents the culmination of romance as a 'tradition' (or a point at which the structure of romance can be audited and catalogued *as* a tradition), Stevenson, acting prior to Frye, represents a point at which the underlying assumptions of this tradition are preclusively denied. Under

such terms, as we shall see in the second section, Stevenson has developed a theory of narrative that has profound implications, as yet unrealised, for what might be described as a modern (that is to say, a post-traditional) theory of romance.

Such claims, of course, are in direct contrast to what has already been indicated, that there is an increasing recognition among critics of the importance of Stevenson in the development of a proto-structuralist approach to fiction. At his most incisive, certainly, Stevenson pioneers a formalist / structuralist ethos in its embryonic stages. Some of the essays examined in this thesis - 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', 'A Humble Remonstrance', 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction' - reveal a marked attempt by Stevenson to explore the technicalities of form in a way, as Norquay relates, which 'foreshadows both formalist and structuralist thinking'.[22] It is an area of Stevenson that clearly needs to be addressed more fully than it otherwise has. Accordingly, this thesis will seek to add to an already burgeoning interest in Stevenson's role as an early formalist / structuralist; but it will do so strictly in relation to Northrop Frye. The reason for this - and here we find another reason as to why Frye is valuable to this thesis - is that Stevenson's critical approaches to narrative in many ways prefigure those of Frye, more so, in fact, than they do any other branch of proto-structuralist or structuralist criticism. Alert to this, Ian Duncan, in referring to nineteenth-century attitudes towards fiction, makes the telling remark:

> ...popular entertainment, didactic purpose and aesthetic quality were to be distinct and contradictory faculties; and "romance" a gross commodity or an elegant abstraction. The most sophisticated defence, by Robert Louis Stevenson, anticipates modernist formalisms, and Frye himself.[23]

It is partly the aim of this thesis to substantiate Duncan's claim with the necessary foundation. Additionally, however, I wish to explore, not only those areas where Stevenson anticipates Frye, but those areas where Stevenson, by undermining the formalist \ structuralist principles which he himself asserts, begins to outdistance Frye.

In the meantime, we can hardly continue to use the terms 'formalism' and 'structuralism' without providing a brief definition, nor without offering a context in which to situate Frye and Stevenson. Formalism we recognise as a movement emerging from Soviet Russia in the early twentieth-century which proposed a difference between ordinary or 'practical' language use and the use of language in a uniquely 'literary' sense. While ordinary language, it was claimed, serves a referential or communicative function, literary language differs through its assertion of the 'formal' relations of elements and devices which convey the 'literariness' of a text. In particular, formalism draws attention to 'foregrounded' elements in literary works that disrupt the linguistic patterns of ordinary language so as to produce an effect of strangeness, freshness or 'defamiliarisation'. In relation to prose fiction, formalism makes a distinction between the 'story' as a chronological series of events and the 'plot' - plot, in this sense, referring to the particular distribution of story-elements, coupled with the introduction of various devices, which are deployed as a means of producing fresh effects. 'Story time', for example, can be interrupted or distended by 'discourse time', or the revelation of events in a story condensed through elliptical summaries or delayed in order to create suspense or mystery. Similarly, formalists sought to explain the recurrent narrative formulae said to persist through literary works as a whole, and posited literature as a self-contained field of

operation that has at its disposal a limited range of functions and effects which can be classified accordingly.

Emerging in France in the 1950s (though largely under the influence of Russian formalism), structuralism can be seen an expansion of formalism. Its aims, says M. H. Abrams, were 'to provide an objective account of all social and cultural phenomena, in a range that includes mythical narratives, literary texts, advertisements, fashions in clothes, and patterns of social decorum'. The interests of structuralism, he continues, are 'not in any particular cultural phenomenon except as it provides access to the structure, features, and rules of the general system that engenders its significance'.[24] In relation to 'literature', structuralism extends the formalist claim of literary works as self-contained or self-referential structures, advocating that literary texts cannot be regarded as having any intrinsic mimetic relationship with reality. At the same time, structuralism introduces a more intensified technical approach in seeking, as Jonathan Culler suggests, 'to construct a poetics which stands to literature as linguistics stands to language'.[25] Structuralism, in other words, regards literature as 'text', as being grounded in a system of conventions and codes which, derived from language as a whole, pre-exist the author who is not so much a creator as a vehicle for an 'always-already' existing literary order. Pushing the author aside, structuralism also seeks to show how the reader's comprehension of a literary text is underlined by an unconscious command of the conventions and codes with which the text is invested.

Ranging from Vladimir Propp's analysis of narrative construction in *The Morphology of the Folktale* to Roland Barthes's exploration of signifying systems in *Mythologies*, there are many overlapping strains and variations of formalism \

structuralism. It is impossible to summarise them here with anything other than general indications. Nevertheless, on these grounds, Frye's work can be viewed as proto-structuralist in its attempts to detect an underlying order of conventions and codes which give the literary work its structure and significance; while it can certainly be viewed as a branch of formalism in its attempts to catalogue recurrent narrative formulae. The point of separation, perhaps, is where Frye focuses not so much on the linguistic system, but on the characters, settings, patterns of events and images which constitute the narrated world of literature. And while these are often the objects of formalism, Frye differs in that he characterises these elements as symbols invested with a metaphorical import that coincides with their structural function and which is a part of the means through which one given structure can be shown as identical to another. In this sense (as I will show in the first chapter), Frye retains a metaphysical framework which is essential to his method and which, in formalism \ structuralism proper, is implied rather than stated.

Frye's anatomy can be seen as part of a wider project of totalisation which, refined through structuralism, has antecedents that go further back than Frye. Frye's own methodology, as I will reveal, has drawn largely from Jung's attempts to catalogue the recurrent images identified in stories, myths and the dreams and fantasies of his patients. It has also drawn, says Frye, 'on the work done on the ritual basis of naive drama in Frazer's *Golden Bough*' (*AC*, p. 108). *The Golden Bough*, in fact, presents one of the earliest and most successful attempts to totalise social and cultural phenomena in having 'identified elemental patterns of myth and ritual that, it claimed, recur in legends and ceremonials of many diverse and far flung cultures'.[26] A structuralist bent is evident in Frazer's attempt to stratify the mental development

of mankind into two contrasting phases. One phase he terms 'magic', which refers to a primitive or superstitious condition of mind, and the other he terms 'religion', the condition of mind which, in civilised societies, supersedes the primitive one. Upon these grounds, Frazer locates an underlying principle applicable to mankind more generally:

> But if in the most backward state of human society now known to us we find magic thus conspicuously present and religion conspicuously absent, may we not reasonable conjecture that the civilised races of the world have also at some period of their history passed through a similar intellectual phase?... When we survey the existing races of mankind from Greenland to Tierra del Fuego, or from Scotland to Singapore, we observe they are distinguished one from the other by a great variety of religions... Yet when we have penetrated through these differences, which affect mainly the intelligent and thoughtful part of the community, we shall find underlying them all a solid stratum of intellectual agreement among the dull, the weak, the ignorant, and the superstitious, who constitute, unfortunately, the vast majority of mankind. One of the great achievements of the nineteenth century was to run shafts down into this low mental stratum in many parts of the world, and thus to discover its substantial identification everywhere.[27]

Moving even closer to Frye, perhaps, is Stevenson's friend and personal champion, Andrew Lang. In his study of *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, Lang expressed the need for an essentially structuralist programme of interpreting myths, which was in many ways answered by Frye as well as extended by him throughout the whole of literature:

> Myth is so ancient, so complex, so full of elements, that it is vain labour to seek a cause for every phenomenon. We are chiefly occupied with the quest for an historical condition of the human intellect to which the element in myths, regarded by us as irrational, shall seem rational enough. If we can prove that such a state of mind widely exists among men, and has existed, that state of mind may be provisionally considered as the fount and *origin* of the myths which have always perplexed men in a reasonable modern mental condition. Again, if it can be shown that this mental stage was one through which all civilised races have passed, the

> universality of the mythopoeic mental condition will to some extent explain the universal *diffusion* of the stories.[28]

Taking this further, Lang offers a scientific basis for the study of myth which, again, resembles that which we will see in Frye:

> ....a new science has come into existence, the science that studies man in the sum of all his works and thoughts, as evolved through the whole process of his development. This science, Comparative Anthropology, examines the development of law out of custom; the developments of weapons from the stick or stone to the latest repeating rifle; the development of society from the horde to the nation ... It is inevitable that this science should also try its hand on mythology.[29]

It is possible, then, to recognise a proto-structuralist tendency in the late nineteenth-century that assuredly prefigures Frye. It is hardly unusual that, from within this environment, Stevenson should begin to show a proto-structuralist tendency in the context of his discussions about fiction. What is unusual, however, is the extent to which Stevenson's proto-structuralism is simultaneous with an apprehension of the limitations of structuralism. For Stevenson, that is to say, the discovery of a structuralist method brought about the challenge of discovering what lay beyond it. Ultimately, then, the suggestion is that Stevenson may prove more useful to us than Frye in establishing a treatise of romance that, inasmuch as it begins to encroach upon a post-structuralist idiom, is more in keeping with the modern theory and practice of fiction.

The suggestion is not an unproblematic one. Stevenson, after all, belongs to the late nineteenth-century. It is important to state at this early stage, though, that this thesis is not a retrospective application of post-structuralist principles to the work of Stevenson or, more widely, to the genre of romance. It is a study of romance through

Stevenson's essays and fictions which, as one of its effects, coincides with certain aspects of structuralist and post-structuralist criticism. It is an attempt to modify the outmoded interpretation of romance provided by Frye's archetypal schema and to show, through Stevenson, the development of romance as a progressive rather than conservative idiom. With Stevenson, by this very manoeuvre, we are liable to encounter theoretical contrasts, not only between Stevenson's ideas and those of a 'protostructuralist'[30] like Frye, but between Stevenson's ideas and those arising from a post-structuralist agenda. Stevenson's essays and fictions, as Glenda Norquay has intimated,[31] can be intensely idiosyncratic. They are, as a consequence, unique to Stevenson and often at odds with any mainstream theory of narrative. They are by no means presented to us, like Frye's, as a coherent body of precepts and propositions: they are not, in other words, delivered as a system or method of interrogation. Stevenson was fairly inept when it came to planning his work. He was opportunistic rather than tactful. There is an engaging disorderliness about his activity as a writer. His career is littered with abortive failures as much as it is with extraordinary successes. Illness certainly played its part: but it should be said that, with Stevenson, disorderliness was sometimes a matter of principle, an impulse to be obeyed, or perhaps an impulse that, when theorised, became a principle to be obeyed. The unrule of unorthodoxy was often too much for him to resist. But although he undertook no consistent or organised study of fiction (as he sometimes intended), he was nevertheless keen to make his mark as a critic and theorist. In this respect, Stevenson seems something of a mercenary, campaigning, where necessary, against the representational overkill of literary realism, determined and efficient in dispatching ideas against the institutionalised creeds (mercantilism, naturalism,

empiricism, determinism) that, in his opinion, threatened to infect and, finally, downgrade the development of fiction. To look at Stevenson's essays and fictions closely is to find that, when brought together and viewed as a whole, they form a thematic crux that transcends their otherwise rampant eclecticism and topical diversity. They possess a conceptual constancy which, while it by no means constitutes a systematic credo, shows in Stevenson a sustained commitment to the discovery and implementation of a theory of fiction. In this respect, Stevenson reveals himself to be a writer on the brink of making significant discoveries about fiction which exceed the limitations of his immediate critical or creative environment.

By way of providing a provisional grounds for these claims, it would be useful to demonstrate, briefly, some of those areas where Stevenson can be seen to prefigure Frye most effectively, some of which arise as a result of his various exchanges with his friend and critical sparring partner, Henry James. It is during these exchanges, which chiefly concern the forms and functions of realism and romance, that Stevenson assembles some of his most powerful arguments and, in doing so, invokes a remarkable correspondence, both conceptually and terminologically, between himself and Frye. In drawing attention to this correspondence at this early stage, we begin to recognise the need for a further study of Stevenson in relation to Frye. We begin to recognise too Frye's failure to account for Stevenson, one of the most prolific romancers of the modern epoch, as an initial evidence of the need to revise Frye's account of romance in general. And, lastly, we can begin to establish a platform for Stevenson's proto-structuralist tendency in such

a way as will enable us, later, to throw into relief those areas where Stevenson radically departs from the structuralist view he precociously asserts.

In his essay 'The Art of Fiction', Henry James makes some potent assertions which, in the event of subsequent criticism, have been duly acknowledged as essential to our understanding of fiction.[32] In stating his own position, James is adamant. Fiction works best when it attempts to accommodate the realities of life and represent them accurately: 'The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life ... Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet'.[33] These and other remarks were seized upon by Stevenson who, in 'A Humble Remonstrance', offers some forceful emendations:

> No art - to use the daring phrase of Mr James - can successfully "compete with life"; and the art that seeks to do so is condemned to perish *montibus aviis* ... The novel, which is a work of art, exists, not by its resemblances to life, which are forced and material, as a shoe must still consist of leather, but by its immeasurable difference from life, which is designed and significant, and is both the method and the meaning of the work. (HR, pp. 171-174)

It would be easy to undervalue this exchange on the grounds that it presents merely a contest between the warring factions of an under-developed Victorian coterie: the self-appointed high-priest of 'realism' versus the self-styled overlord of 'romance'. However, there is a definite sense in which James and Stevenson reach a common ground in their attempts to reconcile the perceived extremes of realism and romance. Bearing in mind, as Wallace points out, that ' "the novel" and "realism" are often treated as interchangeable terms',[34] James complains:

> There is an old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident which must have cost many a smile to the intending fabulist who was keen about his work. It appears to me as little to the point as the equally celebrated distinction between the novel and the romance - to answer as little to any reality. There are bad novels and good novels, as there are bad pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning ... What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?... The novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character - these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for there own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional queer predicaments, but to have little reality or interest for the producer, from whose point of view it is of course that we are attempting to consider the art of fiction.[35]

In 'A Gossip on Romance', written earlier than 'A Humble Remonstrance', Stevenson makes a similar point, although it is noticeable, already, that he implicates realism as the property of romance, as opposed to James who appears to put each on an equal footing:

> True romantic art, again, makes a romance of all things. It reaches into the highest abstraction of the ideal; it does not refuse even the most pedestrian realism. *Robinson Crusoe* is as realistic as it is romantic; both qualities are pushed to an extreme, and neither suffers.[36]

It is interesting, and perhaps unexpected, to find that James and Stevenson, biases permitting, are effectively saying the same thing: that the extremes of realism and romance are reciprocal tendencies acting within the same sphere of unreality - fiction. Neither are prepared to accept the reduction of fiction to inaccurate categories which cannot account for its full range of functions and effects. The difference, inasmuch as there is one, is one of degree, rather than outright generic discrepancy. Both, then, propose a view of fiction that many contemporary critics, as we have seen with Frye, accept as a common critical currency - that the distinction between realism and romance as separate categories of fiction is essentially bogus.

For James, we know that accurate representation should be the prevailing aim in a work of fiction, yet he liberally advocates the value of romance. We could say, then, that James in some ways pre-empts Frye's admonitions against the tendency to value realism at the expense of romance. But it is Stevenson's insistence on realism as a method of technical artifice, rather than a means of *re*-presentation, that most astutely presupposes the views expressed by twentieth-century (proto-)structuralists.

Stevenson's fairly ground-breaking assertions on 'the form and function of the novel'[37] were largely achieved through his theoretical sabotage of realism, which involved an insistence on romance as the defining attribute of fiction and a rejection of mimesis as a valid operation of narrative. As Norquay is at pains to point out, however:

> ...it is worth remembering that his writing also attempts to re-contextualise 'realism' as a theoretical term, offering a more sharply theorised analysis of what would now be called the ideological imperative of realism - that it makes itself appear as all encompassing whereas in fact, he suggests in a letter to Bob, 'realism is a method, and only methodic in its consequences'.[38]

The same argument is developed, more lucidly, in another letter to (Stevenson's cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson) Bob:

> Realism I regard as a mere question of method ... Real art, whether ideal or realistic, addresses precisely the same feeling, and seeks the same qualities - significance or charm. And the same - very same - inspiration is only methodically differentiated according as the artist is an arrant realist or an arrant idealist. Each, by his own method, seeks to save and perpetuate the same significance of charm; the one by suppressing, and the other by forcing detail.[39]

This is Stevenson in prefigurative mode, where he begins to encroach upon a twentieth-century idiom. For Stevenson, the nineteenth-century penchant for 'pure'

mimesis and, especially, for the scientific mimicry of naturalism meant, in practice, a representational pedantry, a technical gerrymandering of literary form made possible by an extraneous 'admission of detail'.[40] What writers and critics needed to beware of, Stevenson warned, was 'the tendency of this extremity of detail, when followed as a principle, to degenerate into mere *foux-de-joie* of literary tricking' (NR, p. 70). He is even more to the point in suggesting, like Frye, that the emergence of realism in the nineteenth-century is 'a merely technical and decorative stage' in the history of literature, that it is not so much a perfected attribute of fiction as a reflection of the fashionable taste for a 'scientific thoroughness' in literary production:

> All representative art, which can be said to live, is both realistic and ideal; and the realism about which we quarrel is a matter purely of externals. It has no special cultus of nature and veracity, but a mere whim of veering fashion, that has made us turn our backs upon the larger, more various, and more romantic art of yore....The historical novel is forgotten. Yet the truth of man's nature and the conditions of man's life, the truth of literary art, is free of the ages. It may be told us in a carpet comedy, in a novel of adventure, or in a fairy tale. (NR, p. 70)

While James has been duly acknowledged for his substantial contribution to the development of fiction, Stevenson, typically, has not. David Daiches complains that 'our serious modern critics hang on every word which James has to utter about the art of fiction, and nobody has anything to say for Stevenson's remarks on the subject'.[41] Yet it is Stevenson's diagnosis of fiction that appears to coincide more readily with the latter-day premise of romance as the definitive condition of fiction.[42] In the mean time, it is noticeable that something of a reversal has occurred in critical attitudes towards fiction. The assumption that the novel and realism were somehow interchangeable terms has been replaced by the acceptance of the novel as essentially an anti-mimetic medium. This being the case, it is reasonable to suppose that there

was a point in time where realism and romance began to be seen as ineffectual and reductive terms belying a conceptual complexity. Frye, conveniently, is forthright in identifying such a point:

> The beginning of a new kind of criticism is marked by Oscar Wilde's *The Decay of Lying*, which explains very lucidly that, as life has no shape and literature has, literature is throwing away its one distinctive quality when it tries to imitate life. It follows for Wilde that what is called realism does not create but can only record things on a subcreative level:
>
> M. Zola sits down to give us a picture of the Second Empire. Who cares for the Second Empire now? It is out of date. Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of life.
>
> Wilde was clearly the herald of a new age in literature, which would take another century or so to penetrate the awareness of critics. He is looking forward to a culture which would use mythical and romantic formulas in its literature with great explicitness, making once more the essential discovery about the human imagination, that it is always a form of "lying," that is, turning away from the descriptive use of language and the correspondence form of truth. (*SS*, p. 46)

Had Frye been more resourceful in his researches, he would have found a far more suitable ally in Stevenson. It is interesting to note, in fact, that throughout Frye's entire study of romance, whether in *The Secular Scripture* or *Anatomy of Criticism*, there is no mention of Stevenson, which seems a fair measure of the extent of Stevenson's exclusion from the canonical repertoire. Already we detect the need to update Frye's account of romance. For if we are to identify an outstanding point in time where a 'new age' in literature begins, then it is not with Wilde that we shall find it, but with James and, especially, with Stevenson. It is with Stevenson that we encounter the suggestion of narrative structures as self-referential rather than referential systems of meaning. It is with Stevenson that we encounter the critical revelation of those elements 'whose appearance', as Duncan emphasised earlier,

'measures the difference between the novel and reality'. We can see as much in essays like 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction' where Stevenson recommends, says Norquay, 'that we should not look too closely for links between characters and their creators, because characters also belong to a historical, generic and discursive framework'.[43] Characters, says Stevenson, are 'verbal puppets'; they

> ...are things of a divided parentage: the breath of life may be an emanation from their maker, but they themselves are only strings of words and parts of books; they dwell in, they belong to, literature; convention, technical artifice, technical gusto, the mechanical necessities of the art, these are the flesh and blood with which they are invested.[44]

Stevenson is bordering here on an archetypal view of structure which situates characters among the structural assets of a pre-existing generic order and, in this way, reveals a marked preoccupation with narrative production that prefigures Frye considerably. At the same time, as we have stated, Stevenson's theoretical excursions, which will be examined at length in the second section, were by no means limited to a proto-structuralist agenda. His preoccupation with the structural operations of narrative is such that he begins to lay the grounds for a romance of the modern idiom that exceeds the limitations of proto-structuralist or structuralist criticism. With this in mind, it is the purpose of this thesis to challenge the notion of stability as the characteristic condition of romance and to redress, through Stevenson, the traditional or institutionalised model provided by Frye. It will be argued that, by his rigorous engagement with conventional formulae, Stevenson exploits and exemplifies the fact that romance does not impose upon narrative a determinate measure of structural stability, but that it is 'always already' endowed with a counter-tendency to disrupt its stable parameters, either by the inevitable failure of its

structurality, which Stevenson 'constructively' admits, or by an authorial implementation of unstable alternatives. The exact nature of these counter-tendencies remains to be seen and will, of course, be revealed in the course of this work.

This said, this thesis will assume the following format. It is divided into three sections consisting of two chapters each. The first section, 'The Cosmology of Romance', will begin with a short synopsis or 'textbook' summary of romance in a general sense before embarking on a summary of romance as we understand it through Frye. It will continue, in the second chapter, with an assertion of principles, derived from several critical sources, that are intended to highlight some of the weaknesses of Frye's scheme while, at the same time, as allowing us to build a means of structural analysis appropriate to Stevenson. In asserting these principles I intend to establish a broader theoretical context within which to situate and clarify Stevenson's own theoretical position. Largely in response to Frye's methodology, with its wilful insistence on the critical value of generalisations, the first section is conducted at a fairly abstract level and issues arguments which will be latterly refined in relation to Stevenson. The second section, 'The Genealogy of Romance', will focus solely on Stevenson and will undertake, firstly, a 'textbook' summary of his reputation and location in the canon; secondly, a summary of his position in relation to Frye; and, thirdly, an extensive evaluation of his theoretical mandate for romance (with some extensive reference to *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Master of Ballantrae*). This latter evaluation will retain and refer to the principles asserted in the first section and reflects the fact that this thesis, in recognition of the need for a fuller analysis of Stevenson's role as a theorist, is concerned as much with Stevenson's theoretical work (his essays) as it is with his

fictions. The third section, meanwhile, will concentrate specifically on Stevenson's fiction, with one chapter on *Will o' the Mill* and another on *The Ebb-Tide*. This section will seek to apply the theoretical content of the first and second sections in a practical sense, and will enable us to see how Stevenson implements, explores and develops his ideas about romance in a purely fictional circumstance. It is hoped that by exploring *Will o' the Mill*, one of Stevenson's earliest, most neglected and, I wish to argue, most important works, and by uncovering some of the strategies at work within it, we may be afforded a better understanding of the anomalies and peculiarities associated with some of Stevenson's more renowned and more widely read compositions (such as *The Ebb-Tide*). Overall, this thesis is designed so that, beginning more broadly, it gradually streamlines the issues it deals with and, with increasing specificity, channels them through Stevenson's critical and creative milieu.

Notes

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[1] Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 3.
[2] Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London and New York: Methuen and Co., 1970), p. 1.
[3] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1972), p. 6.
[4] Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University press, 1976), pp. 41 - 42. Further references appear in the text.
[5] It may be useful to expand a little on the 'seriousness' of realism and its alleged difference from romance. A very general definition of realism might also be appropriate, if not absolutely necessary, and may provide a useful contrast to the definition of romance given in the following chapter.

Realism we ultimately recognise as a development of Aristotelian principles of imitation and mimesis, corresponding to what Christopher Nash calls 'the "*referential*" motive' in fiction, where 'the book refers to the world outside it'. As Nash goes on, 'the essentially right procedures for referentially-motivated fiction are those of *mimesis*', which he defines as 'the material transcription of the empirically verifiable data (the objects) of the physical senses'. In realism, the element of mimesis exhibits an absolute deference to 'what is most *probable* according to our past experience of the actual world, particularly as exemplified by the procedures of history and science'. Likewise, it expresses the belief 'that there is a positively determinable world - which we may call the world of "actuality" - external to the work of fiction and which is the fundamental responsibility of fiction to represent...'.

Christopher Nash, *World-Games: The Tradition of Anti-Realist Revolt* (London and New York: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1987), pp. 8 - 9.

If, 'for the Realist, it's not the truth merely of nature, but of human nature, that fiction claims to show', then the mimetic boundaries must be extended. Realism is 'anthropocentric': it reflects 'a world in which God has fallen - or been pushed - into the background'. It therefore seeks to demonstrate what is 'true of men and women' in ways which 'must somehow fit with what we know - or think we know - to be true of "mankind as a species" '. Accordingly, realism tends towards the principle that 'what matters and what's true is to be found buried in the details of "common", "typical", "average" people and events, set in day to day middle range of quotidian experience'. The environments within which characters think and act are generally unexceptional. It is their idiosyncratic responses to 'narrative *situations*' that may prove exceptional. And, even then, realism tends to reflect preoccupations similar to our own - the 'activities and perceptions of characters ostensibly seeking physical well-being and psychological fulfilment' (Nash, *World-Games*, pp. 13 - 15).

Often, says Wallace Martin, the emergence of realism is seen as coincident with the emergence of the novel, the expansive form of which could afford a 'representation of life in all its diversity' and, so, offer a 'break away from conventional forms and imaginary situations'. Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p. 18. By the early twentieth-century, in fact, the 'view equating the novel with realism had gained general acceptance', and 'discussion of romances declined' (Martin, *Recent Theories*, p. 21). This explains why many twentieth-century critics, like Ian Watt, have tended to characterise the novel for 'its rejection of traditional plots', whilst advocating that 'the novelist's primary task is to convey the impression of fidelity to human experience'. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1960), p. 13.

The 'seriousness' of the realist novel rests on the fact, says Wallace Martin, that it may provide

> ....a record of the problems confronting individuals in a stable social structure, given their circumstance and class origin, or the problems they face when confronted with social change. The novel can serve a reportorial function, bringing into consciousness the varied human conditions that culture and literature had not previously considered important. It can record the human experience underlying and perhaps explaining the impersonal chronicles of historians... The emphasis on representational truth and moral issues are related to its educational goals: even when the novel is didactic, it can be used to gain knowledge about life (Martin, *Recent Theories*, p. 18-19).

It was under such terms that Leavis championed the novel, whilst insisting on the premise that 'accurate transcription, whether of mind or world, is desirable' (Martin, *Recent Theories*, p. 20). Great novelists, said Leavis, are marked by the fact 'that they not only change the possibilities of the art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote: awareness of the possibilities of life' (Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 2). They have, he goes on, 'an unusually developed interest in life' and 'are distinguished by a vital capacity for experience, a kind of reverent openness before life, and a marked moral intensity' (Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 8 - 9). In contrast, romance has been characterised - as in the case of Robert Kiely - by its 'rejection of the present, of mortality, and of the responsibility of making moral judgements...'. Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Adventure Tradition* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 40. It was because of this that Leavis was inclined to exclude romance from his appraisal of 'the great tradition', commenting in a footnote: '...[Scott] made no serious attempt to work out his own form and break away from the bad tradition of the eighteenth-century romance... Out of Scott a bad tradition came. It spoiled Fenimore Cooper, who had first-hand interests and the makings of a distinguished novelist. And with Stevenson it took on "literary" sophistication and fine writing' (Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, p. 6).

[6] Howard Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction: The Uses and Abuses of Literary Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 10.

[7] Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction*, p.11.

[8] Felperin, *Beyond Deconstruction*, p. 26.

[9] Beer, *Romance*, p. 66.

[10] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 2.

[11] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 2.

[12] Echoing this, Wayne Booth has said that, not only would 'most novelists from the beginnings of fiction' follow 'the general assumption that a novel should seem real', 'many novelists and critics in this [the twentieth] century' would go along with 'the assumption that a realistic effect is worth the sacrifice of most if not all other virtues'. Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 53. Kathryn Hume is straight to the point when she complains:

> ...it is an astonishing tribute to the eloquence and rigour of Plato and Aristotle as originators of western critical theory that most subsequent critics have assumed mimetic representation to be the essential relationship between text and the real world.... We might rather say that Plato and Aristotle between them tore a large and ragged hole in western consciousness. Ever since their day, our critical perceptions have been marred by this blind spot, and our views on literature curiously distorted. Katheryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York and London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1984), p. 5.

Stevenson himself, of course, has been one of the most notable victims of a critical bias towards realism which, observes Alistair Fowler, is 'still recognised in practice, however strongly execrated in theory'. In proving the point, Fowler draws attention to the 'entry' on Stevenson in *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research* (1966), which says: 'Stevenson has been omitted, in spite of his influence on romantic fiction, because his adult novels are few and of a debatable rank'. See Alistair Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson', in Ian Campbell (ed.), *Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction* (Manchester: Carcanet New Press LTD, 1979), p. 106.

[13] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (1948). Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (2d ed., 1968).

[14] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), p.116. Further references appear in the text.

[15] The point, in fact, has been supported by a number of commentators on realism. One of the most celebrated of these, George Levine, has remarked: 'Although novels may aspire to create the illusion of reality and to tell the truth, the most fruitful direct approach to fiction is through a focus on romance elements, romance being the generator of form'. George Levine, 'Realism Reconsidered', in John Halperin (ed.), *The Theory of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 239. Similarly, in his book *Fictional Truth*, Michael Riffaterre has stressed:

> The only reason that the phrase "fictional truth" is not an oxymoron, as "fictitious truth" would be, is that fiction is a genre whereas lies are not. Being a genre, it rests on conventions, of which the first and perhaps only one is that fiction specifically, but not always explicitly, excludes the intention to deceive. A novel always contains signs whose function is to remind readers that the tale they are being told is imaginary. Michael Riffaterre, *Fictional Truth* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 1.

[16] The phrase is taken from Stevenson's essay 'A Chapter on Dreams', in *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, ed. Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 131.

[17] Martin, *Recent Theories*, p. 83.

[18] The assumption that formulaic structures are necessarily stable is rife among critics and is often asserted in contrast to realistic modes where, it is assumed, formulae are absent. As John Cawelti has said: 'The mimetic element in literature confronts us with the world as we know it, while the formulaic element reflects the construction of an ideal world without the disorder, the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the limitations of the world of our experience'. John Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 13. George Levine, meanwhile, has remarked that 'romance implies an ordered, stable, almost static universe,' while 'the novel implies a growing, changing, disordered one, or one in which order can be achieved only through change'. George Levine, *The Boundaries of Fiction: Carlyle, Macaulay, Newman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 15.

[19] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 2.

[20] Boris Eichenbaum, 'Introduction to the Formal Method', in Rivkin and Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 13.

[21] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Humble Remonstrance', *Memories and Portraits* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), p. 174. Further references appear in the text.

[22] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 21.

[23] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 19.
[24] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Hardcourt Jovanovich College Publishers, 1993), p. 280.
[25] Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 275.
[26] Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 223.
[27] James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1922), pp. 55 - 56.
[28] Andrew Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1995), pp. 7 - 8.
[29] Lang, *Myth, Ritual and Religion*, pp. 30 - 31.
[30] The description is Howard Felperin's, from *Beyond Deconstruction*, p. 25.
[31] See Glenda Norquay's introduction to *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, pp. 1 - 25.
[32] Such acknowledgements abound. In seminal texts like, for example, F. R. Leavis's *The Great Tradition* and Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, James occupies a pivotal position; while Wallace Martin suggests of James, in *Recent Theories of Narrative*, that his 'discussions of points of view are among the first and best available' (p. 20).
[33] Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', *Henry James, The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin Books LTD, 1987), pp.188- 200.
[34] Martin, *Recent Theories*, p. 57.
[35] James, 'The Art of Fiction', p. 196.
[36] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Gossip on Romance', *Memories and Portraits* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1912), p. 161. Further references appear in the text.
[37] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 4.
[38] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 6.
[39] Stevenson in a letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, in George E. Brown (ed.), *A Book of Robert Louis Stevenson: Works, Travels, Friends, and Commentators* (London: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1919), p. 204.
[40] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'A Note on Realism', *Essays Literal and Critical* (London: Tusitala Edition, 1923), p. 69. Further references appear in the text.
[41] David Daiches, *Stevenson and the Art of Fiction*, p. 6, in Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 1.
[42] Stevenson's apprehension of romance as the fundamental principle of fiction may go some way to explaining the frequency (and, some have claimed, flippancy) with which he is apt to use the term 'romance'. His apparent failure to offer a concise definition has aroused complaints among his auditors. Peter Keating, for example, has protested that, for Stevenson, romance stood for 'almost anything that wasn't realism'. Without knowing it, Keating's protest has in fact provided a fairly accurate summary of Stevenson's position - that fiction, by definition, is romantic and realism, merely, one of its effects. See Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875 - 1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989), p. 348.
[43] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 21.
[44] Stevenson, 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction', in *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 158.

Part One

The Cosmology of Romance

Chapter One

The Cosmology of Romance I

Definitions are so varied, and its application so wide, that there is a certain indeterminacy about 'romance' which may lead us to express rather vaguely, like Gillian Beer, 'the continuity of its wildly various forms'. As Beer goes on: 'The word's spectrum of meaning has to be wide to include *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Fairie Queene*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *Lord Jim*, all of which have been called romances'.[1] Clearly, it is a word that requires a rigorous interpretation if it is to have any explanatory value at all. It is the aim of this chapter, therefore, to consolidate a preliminary definition of romance before concentrating solely on the advanced definition developed by Frye who, as suggested previously, has done more to enhance our understanding of romance than anyone. Beginning, then, with a chronological overview of its 'wildly various forms', we will continue with a general summary of its characteristic features, with the intention, overall, of moving gradually towards Frye.

The etymological origins of the word 'romance' can be traced to the early Middle Ages where, initially, it referred to the vernacular languages descended from Latin and, latterly, to literatures conceived in the vernacular tongues, which consisted mainly of chivalric romances. Eventually, as Gillian Beer points out, 'the meaning of the word extended to include the qualities of the literature in these tongues,' which were 'a preoccupation with love and adventure and a peculiar vagrancy of imagination'. Literatures conceived in the vernacular offspring of Latin, however, do

not represent the origins of romance as a form. As Beer points out: 'The romance as a literary kind is often exclusively associated with medieval literature ... But the romance has antecedents far back beyond twelfth-century Europe'. The fact that Elizabethans drew 'heavily on Greek romances'[2] is a measure of the influence of classical sources. Likewise, we need only think of Shakespeare's romances to note their dependency too on those made available through the fables, legends and ballads of a folklore tradition. As Frye observes: 'There are hardly any comedies of Shakespeare, and few tales told on the Canterbury pilgrimage, that do not have some common folktale theme prominently featured in them' (*SS*, p. 7). Clearly, a preliterate story-telling tradition, and the latent absorption of oral material into written texts, has provided an abundance of raw ingredients for the burgeoning *oeuvre* of romance.

So far, then, we have several tributaries feeding the one generic mainstream: folklore, such as the tales collected by archivists like the Brothers Grimm and Andrew Lang; Greek and Latin romances, such as those of Heliodorus or Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*; and medieval or chivalric romances, such as the Arthurian legends of Chritien de Troyes and the later adaptations of Thomas Malory. From here on, the progress of romance becomes easier to trace. It is given fresh impetus by the Elizabethans, who drew upon all of the sources above - and this, perhaps, served to amalgamate the genre. Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Sidney's *Arcadia* are the most prominent contributions at this stage. In the event of the novel, and mainly as a result of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a 'deviant' strain of romance is introduced, and one through which its complexion is thoroughly altered. Largely derived from the 'picaresque narratives' of sixteenth-century Spain, the 'parody-romance', with its

self-reflexive irony and tendency towards farce and disenchantment, is often regarded as a point of a separation between romance and the novel. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, romance begins to move in several directions. A chivalric strain continues in the French, although it begins to wear out and is confined, by now, to aristocratic circles. It undergoes further transformations at the hands of religious Puritans, including Bunyan and Milton, who adopted romance as a vehicle for Christian dogma. Perhaps a more telling example of things to come lay in the criminal romances, such as Francis Kirkman's *The Counterfeit Lady Unveiled*, which engaged in a thrilling exposition of underworld activities. In the aftermath of *Don Quixote*, these widely popular criminal romances showed, says Beer, 'one of the early reconciliations between "novel" and "romance" '.[3]

During the age of the Enlightenment, romance comes under attack from an intolerant literati. Samuel Johnson summarised the general mood, expressing bewilderment at how 'this wild strain of imagination found reception so long in polite and learned ages'.[4] In spite of Jonson's condemnation, romance enjoys further expansion in prose form, retaining as yet its chivalric connections through the work of female novelists like Eliza Haywood, Fanny Burney and Clara Reeves. Its most significant return to popularity, however, comes via James Macpherson's contrived legends of *Ossian* (1760). Coupled with this comes the enormous impact of the Gothic romance, initiated in 1765 with the publication of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and galvanised further by Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, published in 1794. The ensuing era of Romanticism further restores romance to prominence. Again, much is extracted from the rich veins of folklore: popular superstitions are fictionally revived in 'Tam O' Shanter' and 'The Rhyme of

the Ancient Mariner'; folk and fairy tales feature highly in German Romantic literature; and a new dimension is added as poets, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, procure an interest in the oriental folk tales of *The Arabian Nights*. Schlegel's *Brief über den Roman* (*Letter about the Novel*), positing romance as a more favourable mode of fiction, proves immensely influential. Inspiration is drawn too from Medieval and Renaissance romances. Keats, for instance, offers a kaleidoscopic blend of all of the former strains of romance in poems like 'The Eve of St. Agnes', which is further enhanced by his re-introduction of the Spenserian stanza. Walter Scott, meanwhile, draws upon former romance materials in metrical narratives such as *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion*.

Mostly as a consequence of Scott, the so-called 'prose romance' becomes a major regenerative force in fiction throughout the nineteenth century. Further exponents of the prose romance - which has 'as precursors the *chivalric romance* of the Middle Ages and the *Gothic novel* of the later eighteenth century'[5] - include Scott's countryman James Hogg, English authors like Emily Bronte and Charles Dickens, and French authors like Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas. An important contribution to prose romance also comes from American writers such as Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Depending on how we look at it, the nineteenth century was an extremely fertile or extremely confusing period in the development of romance. As Beer points out:

> ...throughout the nineteenth century the idea of "the romance" was persistently revived and interpreted afresh by artists according to their individual needs. As a result it begins to appear in a bizarre variety of forms: day-dream, allegory, history, fairy-tale, horror-tale, psychological fantasy. All could be claimed as romances.[6]

There are certain varieties, however, that fit firmly into the framework. Following on from prose romance comes the enduringly popular adventure-romances, pioneered by Captain Marryat, Rudyard Kipling and H. Rider Haggard. Robert Fraser has summarised the adventure-romance as 'a narrative prose form which retained the shape and trajectory of epic or myth, while keeping in touch with the modern world through its physical context, its characterisation, and its dialogue'.[7] As the title of his book suggests - *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* - this is the kind of romance with which Stevenson is usually associated. In the general context of romance, however, Stevenson's fiction might best be described as encyclopaedic in that it alludes to or incorporates all, or most, of the varieties described above.

Much of what occurs in twentieth-century romance is a result of nineteenth-century innovations. What is generally regarded as the genre's most significant expansion in the twentieth-century arrives via the romance of science, or 'science fiction'. Poe, Stevenson and Jules Verne all figure highly in the emergence of this phase. Fantasists, such as Tolkien and Mervyn Peake, in the wake of the nineteenth-century Scottish author George MacDonald, initiate a comparable trend with *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Titus Groan* trilogy, establishing what is known to us now as 'fantasy'. There are numerous twentieth-century variations which could also come under the title of romance: 'westerns', detective or spy 'thrillers', the proverbial 'Mills and Boon' - these and more will at least partly fulfil romance criteria.

Having offered a chronology, the problem arises as to the apparent disunity within a tradition which, in being catalogued as a tradition, ought to convey some intrinsic unity or conglomerate range of functions and effects. It is noticeable that the

word is seldom unaccompanied, that it is usually prefixed, or even superseded, by some other term. *Folklore*, *fable*, *chivalric*, *pastoral*, *parody*, *Gothic*, *prose*, *historical*, *adventure*, *fantasy*, *science fiction* - all of these, and more, exist as independent items, yet all of them fall under the generic umbrella of romance. And this in itself is an accurate indication of the nature of the genre, that it is generically multifarious and by no means succinct - hence the difficulty in establishing a compact definition. We can begin to establish a more adequate definition, however, by exploring those features which are said to inhabit all of the above forms and which, collectively, have come to represent the serial ingredients of romance.

In the first place, it is part of the effect of romance to intoxicate its readers with mysteries, with marvellous events and with abnormal possibilities, or to create what Gillian Beer has referred to as an 'amplitude of proportions'.[8] Romance embroiders worldliness with otherworldliness, the supernatural with the natural, the bizarre with the ordinary. It is a form that drives an anti-representational wedge between fiction and reality. 'All fiction', remarks Beer, 'contains two primary impulses: the impulse to imitate daily life and the impulse to transcend it'.[9] In the case of romance, the overwhelming tendency is towards transcendence:

> It oversteps the limits by which life is normally bounded. The world of romance is ample and inclusive, sustained by its own inherent, often obsessive laws. It is not an entire world; it intensifies and exaggerates certain traits in human behaviour and recreates human figures out of this exaggeration... It absorbs the reader into experience which is otherwise unattainable. It frees us from our inhibitions and preoccupations by drawing us entirely into its own world - a world which is never fully equivalent to our own although it must remind us of it if we are to understand it at all.[10]

It is said of romance, moreover, that it 'likes violent stimulus'(*SS*, p. 23), that it is 'sensational', that it asserts 'action and plot, particularly of a violent and exciting sort', and that it seeks to provide its readers, says John Cawelti, with 'a means of temporary escape from the frustrations of life'. And it is in this sense that romance has often been regarded as oppositional to realism. In stressing the point, Cawelti reiterates some of the distinctions disputed by Stevenson and James in the introduction, whilst drawing attention to an area of romance as yet to be discussed - its formulaic structure: '... we can say that formulaic works necessarily stress intense and immediate kinds of excitement and gratification as opposed to the more complex and ambiguous analyses of character and motivation that characterise mimetic literature'.[11] The emphasis on violence and excitement, meanwhile, can be situated under the heading of adventure, which is perhaps the most essential feature of romance; and it is the theme of adventure, says Frye, that gives romance its particular structure:

> The essential element in romance is adventure, which means that romance is naturally a sequential and processional form ... As soon as romance achieves a literary form, it tends to limit itself to a sequence of minor adventures leading up to a major or climacteric adventure, usually announced at the beginning, the completion of which rounds off the story. (*AC*, pp.186 -187)

What Frye, in fact, is describing is 'the element that gives literary form to romance, the quest' (*AC*, p. 187), an aspect of romance which will be studied in detail in due course. Accordingly, we might furnish the quest apparatus with additional elements, some of which are summarised by Beer. Broadly common to any romance, regardless of time or place in the canon, are

> ...the themes of love and adventure, a certain withdrawal from their own societies on the part of both reader and romance hero, profuse sensuous detail, simplified characters (often with a suggestion of allegorical significance), a serene intermingling of the unexpected and the everyday, a complex and prolonged succession of incidents... a happy ending, amplitude of proportions, a strongly enforced code of conduct to which all characters must comply.[12]

As Beer suggests, the theme of love plays a prominent role and is the central feature of some romances, often serving as the object of the quest itself. But while the quest apparatus remains firmly intact over time, romance presents, over the course of its development, a variable range of quest-objectives:

> ....sexual love is one of the great themes of the romance. It is not, however, quite as universal as is sometimes suggested. In some romances, adventure which commonly goes alongside love as the great theme and machinery of the work, may take over entirely. The search for treasure, whether it be Grail or gold, or dragon's horde, is engrossing enough in itself, and the object of the quest serves as the love-object. *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Treasure Island* and *The Hobbit* are three romance-mutants of this sort.[13]

Given the variety of quest-objectives, and the variety of examples given by Beer, we might seem, yet again, to be experiencing a disunity among the forms of romance. According to Frye, however, the shifting planes of emphasis described above can be accounted for by the principle of displacement. In the same way that realism is reckoned to be a displacement of romance, so the various forms of romance, when related to one another as a whole, can be regulated as a continuous series of displacements which have undergone, through successive shifts over time, an organic modification of narrative 'structure to a demand for greater conformity to ordinary experience' (*SS*, p. 39). In comparing, for example, the general characteristics of Medieval romance with the prose variety of the early nineteenth century, we find

significant adjustments in where and how there occurs an 'amplitude of proportions'. In describing each in isolation, M. H. Abrams indicates a number of differences. Of the chivalric form, he relates:

> Its standard plot is one of a quest undertaken by a single knight in order to gain his lady's favour; frequently its central interest is *courtly love*, together with tournaments fought and dragons and monsters slain for the damsel's sake; it stresses the chivalric ideals of courage, loyalty, honour, mercifulness to an opponent, and exquisite and elaborate manners; and it delights in wonders and marvels. Supernatural events in the epic had their causes in the will and actions of the gods; romance shifts the supernatural to this world, and makes much of the mysterious effect of magic, spells, and enchantments.[14]

Of prose romance, on the other hand, Abrams states:

> It usually deploys characters who are sharply discriminated as heroes and villains, masters or victims; its protagonist is often solitary, and relatively isolated from a social context; it tends to be set in the historical past, and the *atmosphere* is such as to suspend the reader's expectations based on everyday experience. The plot of prose romance emphasizes adventure, and is frequently cast in the form of the quest for the ideal, or the pursuit of an enemy; and the nonrealistic and occasionally melodramatic events are claimed by some critics to project in symbolic form the primal desires, hopes and terrors in the depths of the human mind, and to be therefore analogous to the materials of dream, myth, ritual and folklore.[15]

It is apparent that the supernatural unreality of the former mode has given way to a more secularised unreality where the 'otherworldliness' of romance is engendered not so much by its inclusion of the supernatural as by its elaborated or 'spectral' re-presentation of the distant historical past. According to the principle of displacement, however, it is noticeable that, while the supernatural oddities of the chivalric romances have given way to the less extravagant oddities of the prose romances, the structural characteristics of each, presented in terms of the quest, remain the same.

It is the structural regularity among the various strains of romance, says Frye, that amalgamates them under one heading. In spite of its representational diversity, romance consistently adheres to the quest structure and, in doing so, abides by a number of devices which are said to recur throughout its full range of displacements, meaning that romance can be reduced to a single model, and that its plurality can be limited to an underlying totality which operates, synchronically, above and beyond specific historical junctures. In emphasising the point, while at the same time registering some of the typical components of the romance machinery, Frye observes:

> In the Greek romances we find stories of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies about the future contortions of plot, foster parents, adventures which involve capture by pirates, narrow escapes from death, recognition of the true identity of the hero and his eventual marriage with the heroine. We open, let us say, *Guy Mannering*, written fifteen centuries later, and we find that, although there are slight changes in the setting, the kind of story being told, a story of mysterious birth, oracular prophecies, capture by pirates, and the like, is very much the same. In Greek romance the characters are Levantine, the setting in the Mediterranean world, and the normal means of transportation is by shipwreck. In science fiction the characters may be earthlings, the setting the intergalactic spaces, and what gets wrecked in hostile territory a spaceship, but the tactics of the storyteller generally conform to much the same outlines. (*SS*, pp. 4-5)

Having suggested the basic principle that romance, as a genre, is consolidated by the recurrence of plot through time, it becomes possible to determine the structure of romance systematically and to make a systematic analysis of its typical, or archetypal, functions. This, at least, has been a principal object of Northrop Frye, whose theory of archetypes will be summarised in miniature in the following sub-sections of this chapter. In providing such a summary, it becomes necessary to incorporate some of Frye's theories in a broader sense, inasmuch as they refer to

literature as a whole, after which we can begin to limit the discussion to romance alone.

The Theory of Archetypes

Seen as a whole, romance forms what Northrop Frye describes as a 'stable genre'. The secret of its stability, he says, resides in the enduring strength of its conventions: '... the conventions of prose romance show little change over the course of centuries, and conservatism of this kind is the mark of a stable genre' (*SS*, p. 4). As part of the need to locate definitions, it might be useful to ask ourselves exactly what is meant by the term 'conventions' and, likewise, to ascertain the difference, if there is one, between conventions and archetypes.

As regards conventions, the answer seems fairly straightforward. As M. H. Abrams explains, conventions are 'conspicuous features of subject matter, form, or technique which occur repeatedly in works of literature', 'recurrent types of character, turns of plot, forms of versification, or kinds of diction and style'. If this is too general, then we can develop it further by isolating what Abrams alludes to as the 'most inclusive' definition of conventions, which takes us closer to Frye's archetypes, where, 'common in structuralist criticism, all literary works, no matter how seemingly realistic, are held to be entirely constituted by literary conventions, or "codes" - of genre, plot, character, language, and so on...'.[16]

The notion of conventions as 'codes', rather than, simply, repeated or recurrent images, is more illuminating in terms of their operational significance. To

think of codes is to think of 'a system of letters or symbols, and rules for their association by means of which information can be represented or communicated for reasons of secrecy, brevity, etc.' (*CED*). Conventions as codes, it follows, must harbour a communicable message, or a certain kind of information which can only be expressed through a system of symbols held together by special rules of association. (The etymological origins of word 'code' are interesting, coming from the French *codex*, meaning book, which returns us directly to a literary context). In a related sense, we might also think of the implications of conventions as an innate distribution of organic design-forces, something akin to the genetic 'codes' that structure animal or plant species or similar phenomena in the natural sciences (and these are analogies, as we shall see, which are often relied upon by Frye). A code of conventions, then, can mean any one of two things: firstly, that the recurrence of conventions is determined by an underlying 'natural' order; and, secondly, that conventions form an interior framework of symbols capable of semantic expansion so that, in Frye's terms, 'the meaning or pattern' of a literary work can be thought of as 'a structure of imagery with conceptual implications' (*AC*, p. 136).

When it comes to assigning the significance of conventions, Frye reduces the rather loose concept of conventions to the rigidity of archetypes in a way that galvanises the principles stated above. The initial difference between conventions and archetypes appears to be one of degree. Abrams' definition of archetypes, for example, coincides, more or less, with his definition of conventions, albeit there are some slight modifications: '... the term archetype denotes recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character types, or images which are said to be identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature...'.[17] Archetypes are conventions, he implies, that

occur throughout a wide variety of texts as single items invested with a trans-textual capability. In turning to Frye's own definition, meanwhile, we can begin to see some telling distinctions: 'The symbol ... is the communicable unit, to which I give the name archetype: that is, a typical or recurring image' (*AC*, p. 99). We notice here that archetypes are 'units of communication' (*AC*, p. 104) arranged, continues Frye, in 'associative clusters' (*AC*, p. 102), rather like a code. And it is as a code of 'conventional associations' - 'most easily studied in highly conventionalized literature: that is, for the most part, naive, primitive, and popular literature', but nevertheless discernible throughout 'the rest of literature' (*AC*, p. 104) - that we can finally draw a distinction between conventions and archetypes. The difference is such that archetypes are conventions which assume their role throughout literature in its entirety. As Frye points out:

> I mean by an archetype a symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience. And as the archetype is the communicable symbol, archetypal criticism is primarily concerned with literature as a social fact and as a mode of communication. By the study of conventions and genres, it attempts to fit poems [Frye's word for literary works in general] into the body of poetry [or literature] as a whole. (*AC*, p. 99)[18]

According to Frye, it becomes possible to detect in literature, à la language, 'a grammar of literary archetypes' (*AC*, p. 135), and to read in them a particular set of meanings which, because they are expressed repeatedly through time, lead Frye to conclude that 'the narrative aspect of literature is a recurrent act of symbolic communication: in other words a ritual...' (*AC*, p. 105).

The archetype, then, is a structural item both in a purely functional sense and in the sense that it is endowed with a particular meaning or communicative value

which is not local to any given narrative, but universal. In the following sub-section, I wish to consider the ways in which Frye, in spite of the immense diversity of individual narratives, is able to apply a collateral theory of structure, before considering the same in relation to the communicative value of structure. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to say something of Carl Gustav Jung, who is in many ways the Godfather of archetypal criticism. In looking briefly at Jung, we can begin to draw attention to another important aspect of Frye's anatomy - namely that concerning the role of the author.

Frye's concept of archetypes is ultimately derived from the concept of archetypes developed by Carl Gustav Jung in the early twentieth century. In Jungian psychology, archetypes are 'primordial images' issuing 'from a "collective unconscious" ' which 'is detached from anything personal and common to all men'.[19] Underlying the 'individuated' self, these 'primordial images' constitute 'the inherited possibilities of human imagination as it was from time immemorial' and are said to belong 'not to the domain of the personal memory but to the secrets of the mental history of mankind'.[20] Paving the way for critics like Frye, the concept of archetypes was applied by Jung, not only to the dreams and disorders of his patients, but to the constructive principles of storytelling: 'The fact of this inheritance explains the truly amazing phenomenon that certain motifs from myths and legends repeat themselves the world over in identical forms... I have called these images or motifs "archetypes" '.[21]

It follows from this that the production of narrative no longer pertains to the individual subject but to what Jung refers to as 'the autonomous complex', described

by Elizabeth Wright 'as a central force in the mind, manifesting itself through the archetypes of the collective unconscious'.[22] Introducing the idea, Jung asserts:

> The unborn work in the psyche of the artist is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature herself quite regardless of the personal fate of the man who is its vehicle. The creative urge lives and grows in him like a tree in the earth from which it draws nourishment. We would do well, therefore, to think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche. In the language of analytical psychology this living thing is an *autonomous complex*. It is a split-off portion of the psyche, which leads a life of its own outside the hierarchy of consciousness.[23]

'For Jung,' says Wright, 'the collective unconscious is the pure source of art, muddied somewhat by the "tributaries" from the personal unconscious'.[24] The same principle is maintained by Frye in his adaptation of the archetypal theory and is applied by him as an alternative view to notions concerning the role of the author as the arbiter of his work. As Wright explains:

> Frye is with Jung in so far as Jung's emphasis on the communal aspect of the creative process and on the work of art undermines the favoured view of the artist as an original genius and instead makes him a medium for the transmission of archetypal myths and images.[25]

In his own terms, Frye defines the individual literary work as the manifestation of an order of symbols that pre-exists the individual author:

> Just as a new scientific discovery manifests something that was already latent in the order of nature, and at the same time is logically related to the total structure of the existing science, so the new poem manifests something that was already latent in the order of words. (*AC*, p. 97)

Where Jung has remarked that it 'is not Goethe that creates *Faust*, but *Faust* that creates Goethe',[26] so we find with Frye that 'Literature shapes itself, and is not

shaped externally' (*AC*, p. 97). Where Jung has described the creative process as a natural force, so we find with Frye that the author 'is not the father of his poem; he is at best the midwife, or, more accurately, the womb of Mother nature herself...' (*AC*, p. 98). And it is with a similar regard for Jung that Frye expands the theory of archetypes to account for the structure and meaning of literature as a whole, the structural aspect of which will be summarised now and the meaning of which immediately after.

Archetypal Structure

To summarise Frye's envisaged totality is to flirt with generalisations. Nevertheless, the fault, if it is a fault, is entirely his own, and one which he is prepared to argue for without seeking some kind of critical immunisation. On the contrary, Frye insists that to generalise is not a crime, but a reflex necessary to the collective critical mind: 'We have to adopt the hypothesis... that just as there is an order of nature behind the natural sciences, so literature is not a pile aggregate of "works", but an order of words', 'a central hypothesis which, like the theory of evolution in biology, will see the phenomenon it deals with as parts of a whole' (*AC*, pp. 16 - 17).

Frye's hypothesis is intended to account for the development of literature as having undergone a sequence of phases through time, beginning with myth and, according to Frye, descending through a successive series of displacements, ranging from the various forms of romance to the various forms of realism. Different modes of narrative, in the simplest sense, can be graded according to whether or not their

'hero's power of action' conforms to, or exceeds, 'the ordinary laws of nature' (*AC*, p. 33) as we generally perceive them. Myths, for example, such as Greek or Biblical myths, are stories about divine super-beings whose actions exceed the actions that we, as ordinary human beings, are capable of performing. Romances are stories, not about gods, but about human heroes whose actions, while they resemble our own, tend nevertheless to exceed them. Realistic fictions, meanwhile, tend to represent characters in a world which, with reasonable accuracy, resembles our own.[27] The same applies, of course, when we are talking about the other characters or content of any given story within any given mode of fiction. In myths, the supernatural and extraordinary are its definitive attributes and occur quite readily; in realism, so-called, the attempt is to adhere to the natural and ordinary as faithfully as possible. In myths, the structural features openly inhabit 'an abstract or purely literary world of fictional design'. Realistic fiction, on the other hand, expresses 'a plausible adaptation to familiar experience' (*AC*, p. 136) which lessens our awareness of its intrinsic fictionality. The crux of the matter for Frye is that, regardless of whether a story's characters are gods or heroes or 'ordinary' humans, they will continue to perform the same functions as recurrent symbols within a story's narrative structure. By the same token, all other contingent structural features will do the same.

In a more complex sense, part of the process of displacement, as explained in the introduction, involves a proliferation of descriptive and discursive detail which further subordinates the abstract quality of narrative structure to a greater demand for representational accuracy. To take an easy example: in a myth such as *The Voyage of the Argos*, the structure of the story, which is a quest, is clearly visible, while in the increased realism of a 'displaced' novel like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the

structure of the story, though a quest, is largely obscured by Marlow's descriptive and discursive rhetoric. In the case of the former, the hero's (Jason's) power of action regularly exceeds that of our own while, in the case of the latter, the hero's (Marlow's) power of action is more or less coincident with our own. The critical dictum stands, according to Frye, that in 'myth we see the structural principles of literature isolated; in realism we see the *same* structural principles (not similar ones) fitting into a context of plausibility' (*AC*, p. 136). In contextualising this principle in relation to romance, meanwhile, Frye states:

> Myth, then, is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance, using that term to mean ... the tendency ... to displace myth in a human direction and yet, in contrast to "realism," to conventionalize content in an idealized direction. (*AC*, pp. 136 - 137)

In effect, then, Frye is applying the same principle given earlier (that romance is consolidated by the recurrence of plot through time) to the whole of western literature, pointing out only that 'the more undisplaced a story, the more sharply the design stands out' (*SS*, p. 38). In spite of the diachronic development of narrative as a series of displacements through time, it maintains, synchronically, a structural unity; it is bound by associative clusters of archetypes and able, therefore, to fulfil its function as a recurrent act of symbolic communication, what Frye has described as a ritual.

Within this scheme, the genre of romance, as Frye has repeatedly stated, occupies a special place of narrative neutrality, affording, as we have seen, 'an unobstructed view of archetypes' and exhibiting the primary functions of narrative in their most concentrated aspect. Consequently, it is through romance that the idea of a

literary totality can be demonstrated most effectively and most effectively engaged. Frye, in fact, distinguishes between two phases of romance, one which represents its earliest or most primitive stages ('naive romance'), and one which represents its ascendancy through literature ('sentimental romance'). Naive romance, says Frye, 'is the kind of story that is found in collections of folk-tales and *marchen*', while sentimental romance (which begins, for Frye, in the late Classical period) is 'a more extended and literary development of the formulas of naive romance' (*SS*, p. 1). In Frye's way of thinking, folk-tales represent the structural origins of romance. They are rigidly formulaic and present the archetypal structure in its most abstract form. From these evolve the more sophisticated narratives which eventually find expression in writing, some of the earliest of which are identified by Frye as the Greek pastoral romances of the second and third centuries. Following its transition to literary status, the various streams and permutations of romance may seem endless, but they will always refer back to an archetypal model which, in the case of romance, is best exampled in folktales.

We recognise the shift from naive to sentimental romance as being among the broader operations of Frye's theory of displacement, where the naive extremity of folktales eventually gives way to the increased degrees of sophistication made possible by writing. Romance, accordingly, will eventually give way to more plausible varieties of fiction in the ways already described in this and the previous chapter. We could say, overall, that if realism is a militant extension of form, archetypal criticism is a militant reduction of form to basic models. Upon this principle, Frye is able to conclude:

> Total literary history gives us a glimpse of the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. We next realise that the relation of later literature to these primitive formulas is by no means purely one of complication, as we find the primitive formulas reappearing in the greatest classics - in fact there seems to be a general tendency on the part of the great classics to revert to them. (*AC*, p. 17)

The most recognisable formula that Frye attributes to fiction is the scenario of the quest, which we have already identified as the characteristic structure of romance. In his application of the archetypal credo, however, Frye offers a much more detailed description of how the constituent phases of the quest are liable to occur:

> The complete form of the romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: that stage of the perilous journey and the preliminary minor adventure; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero. We may call these three stages respectively, using Greek terms, the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict. (*AC*, pp. 186-187)

Thereafter, we are able to establish the relevant associations between the characters who participate in the quest scenario. As Frye explains:

> The characterization of romance follows its general dialectic structure, which means that subtlety and complexity are not much favoured. Characters tend to be either for or against the quest. If they assist it they are idealized as simply gallant or pure; if they obstruct it they are caricatured as simply villainous or cowardly. Hence every typical character in romance tends to have his moral opposite confronting him, like black and white pieces in a chess game. (*AC*, p. 195)

Most conspicuous in 'primitive' formulae, Frye's model of romance can be applied to fiction in general, though, by various degrees of displacement, it assumes more complex forms than we see, for example, in *Grimms' Fairy Tales*. It becomes

possible, in this respect, to identify a structural uniformity between Jason's pursuit of the golden fleece in *The Voyage of the Argos* and Elizabeth Bennet's pursuit of a suitor in *Pride and Prejudice*; between Ahab's vengeful pursuit of the white whale in *Moby Dick* and Rebus's pursuit of his daughter's abductor in *Knots and Crosses*; or between Dante's pursuit of the truth in *The Divine Commedy* and Joseph K's pursuit of the truth in *The Trial*. To detect an archetypal uniformity of structure is one thing. But the question remains as to how the same principle can be applied in relation to communicative value or, in other words, meaning.

Archetypal Meaning

If archetypes are conventions which have attained the status of 'units of communication', it follows that they must have something to communicate. The fact that they communicate something betrays an intrinsic relationship between structure (the cumulative arrangement of conventional associations) and meaning (the cumulative arrangement of conventional associations as communicable units). Structure in this sense is a species of code or semiology where the interactive symbols and images (or archetypes) are capable of achieving a literary totality in a semantic as well as structural sense.

Broadly speaking, Frye begins to interpret the archetypal meaning of literature as follows: 'The archetypal view of literature shows us literature as a total form and literary experience as a part of the continuum of life, in which one of the poet's functions is to visualize the goals of human work' (*AC*, p. 115). The so-called

goals of human work are defined by Frye as the human desire for civilisation. 'Civilisation', he says, is 'the process of making a total human form out of nature, and it is impelled by the force [of] desire' (*AC*, p. 105). It is within the domain of art, especially, that the desire for civilisation can be most effectively organised and expressed:

> In its archetypal aspect, art is a part of civilisation, and civilisation we defined as the process of making a human form out of nature. The shape of this human form is revealed by civilisation itself as it develops: its major components are the city, the garden, the farm, the sheep-fold, and the like, as well as human society itself. An archetypal symbol is usually a natural object with a human meaning, and it forms part of the critical view of art as a civilized product, a vision of the goals of human work. (*AC*, p. 113)

Literature, in other words, enables the transformation of the chaos of nature and reality which contains us into a desirable order and social stability, of a kind which is analogous to the general pursuit of extending a human control over nature and of issuing an imaginative transformation of reality through the practices of art. However, says Frye, literature 'not only tries to illustrate the fulfilment of desire, but to define the obstacles to it' (*AC*, p. 106). Ultimately, then, the total meaning of literature, in its archetypal phase, can be summarised as 'a presentation of the conflict of desire and actuality' (*AC*, p. 111) where the conflict is between the desire for the accomplishment of civilisation over the fear and threat of 'the world that desire totally rejects: the world of nightmare ... the world as it is before human imagination begins to work on it ... the world also of perverted or wasted work, ruins and catacombs, instruments of torture and monuments of folly' (*AC*, p. 147). Literature is therefore characterised by a 'moral dialectic in desire', between 'wish-fulfilment dream and the anxiety or nightmare dream of repugnance'; or, by 'a

dialectic of desire and repugnance: desire for fertility or victory, repugnance to drought or enemies' (*AC*, p. 106).

These expansive claims can be substantiated somewhat if we relate them to romance and, specifically, to the structure of the quest. According to Frye, 'the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from reality but will still contain that reality' and is often exampled, archetypally, by 'the victory of fertility over the waste land' (*AC*, p. 193). St. George's legendary killing of the dragon and King Arthur's attainment of the Holy Grail, where, in each of these cases, the land is restored to its former social and agricultural vitality, are two such examples. The same theme can be said to persist throughout a variety of displacements. In the film *Jaws*, for instance, Chief Brodie engages in a similar quest to St. George in seeking to rid the prosperous resort of Amity Island of the monster-shark that threatens to collapse the island's economic infrastructure by driving away its influx of tourists. The fertility of the land, as such, is not at stake, but the social implications - the prospect of chaos and disintegration among the community, of economic ruin and the intrusion of savage forces upon the human transformation of nature - are the same. The quest for the Grail, meanwhile, finds numerous equivalents in the quest-for-treasure motif (of which Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is, probably, the best example), and exhibits the archetypal theme of the recovery of the quest object as a means of restoring the degraded social order to a desirable status. Relating this to the function of characters, heroes, as archetypal components of the quest, become embodiments of the desire for that which is desirable, while villains, who act as obstacles to the quest, become embodiments of that which is undesirable and detested. As archetypes, heroes and villains are analogues presented in stories

which are themselves analogues of the conflict between desire and actuality. Each acquires a significance and moral value that exceeds the limitations of their immediate fictional circumstance (that which is desirable is 'good', which means that the hero is good, while that which is undesirable is 'evil', which means that the villain is evil). As such, romance, collectively, consists of ritual re-enactments of the attempt to visualise the goals of human work and communicates the triumph of civilisation over the undesirable alternatives that threaten to prevent it. The accomplishment of the quest, meanwhile, becomes part of the metaphorical fabric of romance as a whole, where individual narratives can be conceived as the dispersed representations of an absolute model.

Given the possibility of an archetypal or absolute model, and given the position of this model as an imaginative transformation of the world that contains us, it is necessary, says Frye, to consider 'the conception of literature existing in its own universe' (*AC*, p. 122). Or, to put it another way: 'The study of archetypes is the study of literary symbols as parts of a whole. If there are such things as archetypes at all, then, we have to take yet another step, and conceive the possibility of a self-contained literary universe' (*AC*, p. 118). In accepting the possibility of a self-contained literary universe, it is necessary to recognise, as part of its organising principle, what Frye describes as 'the still center of the order of words'. 'Without such a centre,' Frye opines, 'there is nothing to prevent the analogies supplied by convention and genre from being an endless series of free associations, perhaps suggestive, perhaps even tantalizing, but never creating a real structure' (*AC*, pp. 117 - 118). On a purely archetypal level, a structural centre can be identified in the recurrence of those symbols which embody 'images of things common to all men'.

One such symbol, the quest, we have already referred to, albeit there are others: 'If archetypes are communicable symbols, and there is a center of archetypes, we should expect to find, at that center, a group of universal symbols... Such symbols include those... of the quest or journey, of light and darkness, and of sexual fulfilment, which would usually take the form of marriage' (*AC*, p. 118). But, in order to fully justify and explain his proposition of 'literature existing in its own universe', Frye attempts to elevate his archetypal credo onto a further level of meaning.

Anagogic Meaning

In Frye's terms, it is not through the archetypal phase alone that literature acquires its maximum totality. 'The archetypal view of literature shows us literature as a total form and literary experience as a part of the continuum of life', he inclines, but 'the archetypal phase' is not 'the ultimate one' (*AC*, p. 115). According to Frye, the ultimate view of literature involves its expansion into anagogic, or mythical, planes of significance, where (what Ian Duncan calls) the 'collective dreamwork' of 'an immanence of archetypes'[28] is said to contain and convey the ideological postulates of a Western metaphysical tradition. 'The form[s] of literature most deeply influenced by anagogy', explains Frye, are the 'definitive myths, or organizations of archetypes' like those of 'the scripture or apocalyptic revelation'. But anagogy is not confined to 'the mythical or theogenic mode' (*AC*, p. 120) alone. There is, says Frye, an anagogic potential residing among the archetypal unit or combination which forms a trans-textual cosmology, best represented in myth, but extending 'vertically'

throughout the whole range of narratives, most actively through the medial 'horizon' of romance.

It is in realising this anagogic potential that literature achieves its cosmic amplitude, striking a radical parity between its own (metaphysical) functions and the (physical) functions of the natural world:

> We see the relation to anagogy also in the vast encyclopaedic structure of poetry that seems to be a whole world in itself, that stands to culture as an inexhaustible storehouse of imaginative suggestion, and seems, like theories of gravitation or relativity in the physical universe, to be applicable to, or have analogous connections with, every part of the literary universe. (*AC*, pp. 120 - 121)

So it is that Frye's literary universe, based on 'the assumption of total coherence' (*AC*, p. 16), is said to consist of the immemorial totality of Western literary experience which, in being expressed via an elaborate 'cosmology' of archetypes, performs an analogous and interpretative function when assessed in relation to exterior contingencies. For Frye, says M. H. Abrams, 'literary works constitute a "self-contained literary universe" which has been created over the ages by the human imagination'. 'Viewed archetypally', Abrams goes on, 'literature turns out to play an essential role in refashioning the material universe into an alternative verbal universe that is humanly intelligible and viable, because it is adapted to essential human needs and concerns'.[29]

On a purely archetypal level, we remember, the object of art is to make a total human form out of nature as part of the continuum of human work. On an anagogical level, however, the position of nature as the container and man as the contained is reversed. Here, literature evolves into an alternative verbal universe which, through phases of imaginative transformation, has been made 'humanly intelligible and

viable' and adapted 'to essential human needs and concerns' so as to reflect, in the end, a vision of the universe as Man ultimately, beyond the scope of his material existence, desires it:

> When we pass into anagogy, nature becomes, not the container, but the thing contained, and the archetypal universal symbols, the city, the garden, the quest, the marriage, are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man who builds his cities out of the Milky Way. This is not reality, but it is the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal, and hence apocalyptic. By an apocalypse I mean primarily the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate. (*AC*, p. 119)

On entering Frye's alternative literary universe, we are enabled a visionary accession to anagogic planes of meaning, whereby the realisation of the goals of human work is not restricted to the secular accomplishment of civilisation. Rather, civilisation - the process of making a human form out of nature - becomes merely a stage in the process of entering a metaphysical 'center of imaginative experience' (*AC*, p. 117). Just as there exists a group of universal symbols at the centre of archetypes, so there exists an anagogic centre where the archetypal functions of narrative structure can be reduced, as it were, to the 'Archetype Proper' - in other words, the Logos - the point from which the literary universe assumes its infinite distribution of conventional associations:

> The sense of the infinitely varied unity of poetry may come, not only explicitly from an apocalyptic epic, but implicitly from any poem ... Thus the center of the literary universe is whatever poem we happen to be reading. One step further, and the poem appears as a microcosm of all literature, an individual manifestation of the total order of words. Anagogically, then, the symbol is a monad, all symbols being united in a

> single infinite and eternal verbal symbol which is, as *dianoia* [meaning], the Logos... (*AC*, p. 121)

The status of the monad as eternal verbal symbol is translated, in narrative terms, through what Frye describes as 'analogies of revelation' (*AC*, p. 121), narratives where 'the incarnate Word' (*AC*, p. 122) undergoes a metaphorical transfiguration from preliterate sublimity to verbal signification. Those works which come closest to the apocalyptic disclosure of the Logos are, Frye has suggested, the 'definitive myths, or complete organizations of archetypes', such as those in the Classical or Biblical mythologies, or 'the epics of Dante and Milton and their counterparts in other modes' (*AC*, p. 121). We have moved, then, from the human goal of civilisation to the apocalyptic disclosure of the linguistic avatar, the Logos, the meaning of which is translated, narratorially, through the archetypal analogues (or metaphors) of character and setting:

> Here the *dianoia* [the meaning] of art is no longer a *mimesis logou*, but the Logos, the shaping word which is both reason and, as Goethe's Faust speculates, *praxis* or creative act. The *ethos* [the character and setting] of art is no longer a group of characters within a natural setting, but a universal man who is also a divine being, or a divine being conceived in anthropomorphic terms. (*AC*, p. 120)

The Logos, effectively, becomes the Telos, conceived, in anthropomorphic terms, as the archetypal figure of the mythical Christ or Godhead. In this we discover the site of an omnific totality, the origin and eventuality of total meaning, the 'still centre' of Frye's literary universe made visible in narrative through conventional symbols and images: 'The god, whether traditional deity, glorified hero, or apotheosized poet, is the central image that poetry uses in trying to convey the sense of unlimited power in human form' (*AC*, p. 120). As Frye points out, 'the independence of the anagogic

perspective' is such that it need not be religious: 'Joyce's non-theological use of the theological term epiphany' or 'Dylan Thomas's exultant hymns to a universal human body' (*AC*, p. 122) show a comparable, if not identical, trend.

As we have said, the myths of the Biblical and Classical traditions are the narratives in which the structural ordination of Frye's literary universe finds its most powerful expression. Considering that romance is a displacement of myth, we may conclude that the structure of romance is organised in the same way and that it performs a similar function, remembering, of course, that, in being a displacement of myth, any apocalyptic disclosures in romance will occur implicitly. Looking at this in detail, and by limiting our discussion of Frye to romance alone, it becomes possible to determine the structure of romance as belonging to, as he describes it, the mythopoeic formula.

The Mythopoeic Formula

The relationship between myth and romance is given special attention by Frye who, we have seen, regards these modes as part of the 'general category of mythopoeic literature' (*AC*, p. 188). Among the differences, he suggests, 'between the mythical and the fabulous is a difference in authority and social function, not in structure' (*SS*, p. 8). Myths, in other words, tend 'to stick together to form a mythology, a large interconnected body of narrative' which has a particular significance, Frye contends, in explaining a 'society's religion, laws, social structure, environment, history, or cosmology'. Romance, meanwhile, consists of a heterogeneous mix of stories that

'lead a nomadic existence' and that, apparently, 'do not expand into larger structures' (*SS*, p. 9). These stories, which include everything from folktales to science fiction, 'seem to be of less importance' and are primarily designed to 'amuse or entertain' (*SS*, p. 6). The value of romance, then, in relation to myths, appears to be negligible. As Frye has stated, however:

> If we were concerned only with structural features we should hardly be able to distinguish between them at all. Most of the stories about the accepted divine beings are myths rather than folktales, but structurally this distinction is more one of content than of actual shape. (*SS*, p. 8)

Thus the structural role of the biblical Christ, if we cast aside the theological implications, begins to resemble the role of redeemer figures like, for example, Edmund Dantés from *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The only difference, structurally, between the mythical hero and the hero of romance, says Frye, is that 'in the myth proper he is divine, in the romance proper he is human. This distinction is much sharper theologically than it is poetically...' (*AC*, p. 188).

Given the structural identification between myth and romance, Frye is inclined to asked: 'Is it possible, then, to look at secular stories as a whole, and as forming a single integrated vision of the world, parallel to the Christian and biblical vision?' It is with this in mind that Frye labels romance a secular scripture and seeks to establish its unity

> ... as a total verbal order, with the outlines of an imaginative universe also in it. The Bible is the epic of the creator, with God as its hero. Romance is the structural core of all fiction: being directly descended from folktale, it brings us closer than any other aspect of literature to the sense of fiction, considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest. (*SS*, p. 15)

Frye, then, is proposing that a displacement has occurred whereby the divine illustrations of myth are paralleled by a secular variety in the stories of romance. Taking this a stage further, it is by asserting the anagogic value of archetypal functions that Frye is able to establish a correlation between the structures of romance and the structures of myth, both of which begin to reveal contiguous patterns of meaning in an anagogic, as well as archetypal, sense.

To demonstrate this we have to consider what Frye eventually comes round to calling the 'central principle of displacement', where the difference between romance and myth can be measured according to a deflation, in romance, of the metaphorical potential that is indigenous to myth. As Frye suggests:

> ... what can be metaphorically identified in myth can only be linked in romance by some form of simile: analogy, significant association, incidental accompanying imagery, and the like. In a myth we can have a sun-god or a tree-god; in a romance we may have a person who is significantly associated with the sun or trees. (*AC*, p. 137)

A more specific example is offered by Frye:

> In the dragon-killing legend of the St. George and Perseus family ... a country under an old feeble king is terrorized by a dragon who eventually demands the king's daughter, but is slain by the hero. This seems to be a romantic analogy (perhaps also, in this case, a descendant) of a myth of a waste land restored to life by a fertility god. (*AC*, p. 137)

In this case, a metaphorical identification exists, in the myth, between the god and fertility so that we have, in the end, the complete or 'literal' metaphor of a fertility god. In the story of St. George, George can only be likened to a fertility god inasmuch as he enables, through the killing of the dragon, the waste land to be restored to its former vigour. In the myth, the hero *is* a god; in the romance, the hero

is *like* a god. To see it this way, we can begin to recognise that romance, as in myth, has a metaphorical potential, and that it can be distinguished from myth only insofar as it involves a reduction of myth to secular levels. Through stages of displacement romance becomes 'less rigorously metaphorical', says Frye, so that 'its imagery presents a human counterpart of the apocalyptic world...' (*AC*, p. 151). But, as Frye is keen to point out, this is only a lessening of the metaphorical potential of myth, not an erasure of it. It therefore becomes possible to reveal in romance an inherently mythical foundation, albeit 'it is only after a comparative study of the story type has been made that the metaphorical structure within it begins to emerge' (*AC*, p. 137).

To see romance as a displacement of myth means that we can trace all romance narratives, through stages of metaphorical reduction, to an initial phase of anagogic significance and to a structural and semantic totality of a kind expressed explicitly in apocalyptic narratives. In romance, as in myth, it becomes possible to trace 'the anagogic aspect of meaning' which enables us to view stories as part of a universe 'of total metaphor, in which everything is potentially identical with everything else, as though it were all inside a single infinite body' (*AC*, p. 136). In romance, as in myth, it becomes possible to experience the apocalyptic disclosure of 'the universal creative word which is all words', or the Logos, and to detect in the heroes of romance displaced equivalents of 'the mind of man who is all men' (*AC*, p. 125), such as we find in the mythical characterisations of gods and christs. In expressing the point, Frye importantly draws attention to the anagogic expansion of the moral dialectic between desire and repugnance, which we saw occurring at an archetypal level. In the same way that archetypes are invested with the moral dialectic of desire and repugnance, so anagogy expands the opposition into

metaphorically enlarged, mythical equivalents. In Frye's terms, these are the 'apocalyptic' (desirable) and the 'demonic' (undesirable) tendencies which give to romance its characteristic values:

> First, there is the undisplaced myth, generally concerned with gods or demons, and which takes the form of two contrasting worlds of total metaphorical identification, one desirable and the other undesirable. These worlds are often identified with the existential heavens and hells of religions contemporary with such literature. These two forms of metaphorical organization we call the demonic and the apocalyptic respectively. Second, we have the general tendency we have called romantic, the tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience. (*AC*, pp. 139 - 140)

Similarly, we can see in the struggle between heroes and villains that informs the quest-romance a mythical dialectic beginning to form. Anagogically, the human hero of romance becomes metaphorically identical with the apocalyptic hero of myth, while the villain of romance becomes associated with demonic threats and impediments:

> The central form of the romance is dialectical: everything is focused on a conflict between the hero and his enemy, and all the reader's values are bound up with the hero. Hence the hero of romance is analogous to the mythical Messiah or deliverer who comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world. The conflict however takes place in, or at any rate primarily concerns, *our* world, which is in the middle, and which is characterized by the cyclical movement of nature. Hence the opposite poles of the cycles of nature are assimilated to the opposition of the hero and his enemy. The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age, and the hero with spring, dawn, order, fertility, vigour, and youth. (*AC*, pp. 187 - 188)

Importantly, the metaphorical reduction of romance to secular levels means that it does not occupy the mythical dimensions of an apocalyptic heaven or demonic hell, but that it is poised, between the two, within the cyclical order of nature. In the

overall context of archetypal and anagogic criticism, a representative model of romance begins to emerge which, according to Frye, is most explicitly revealed in the work of Milton and Dante:

> The conception of a heaven above, a hell beneath, and a cyclical cosmos or order of nature in between forms the ground plan, *mutatis mutandis*, of both Dante and Milton. The same plan is in paintings of the Last Judgement, where there is a rotary movement of the saved rising on the right and the damned falling on the left. We may apply this construct to our principle that there are two fundamental movements of narrative: a cyclical movement with the order of nature, and a dialectical movement from that order into the apocalyptic world above. (The movement to the demonic world below is very rare, because a constant rotation within the order of nature is demonic in itself.) (*AC*, pp. 161 - 162)

The movement from the cyclical order of nature into an apocalyptic world above constitutes, for Frye, the fundamental structure of romance. Or as he puts it more descriptively: '...the quest romance takes on a spiral form, an open circle where the end is the beginning transformed and renewed by the heroic quest' (*SS*, p. 174). The spiral model is both cyclically and teleologically inclined. For Frye, it contains the semantic and structural totality and thrust of romance and is exemplified, again, by Dante:

> Dante's *Inferno* is a descending spiral, taking us into narrowing and unchangeable closed circles; the *Purgatorio* spiral gives us the opposite creative movement. When Dante reaches the presence of God at the end of the *Paradiso*, the universe turns inside out, becoming God-centered instead of earth-centered, an end that reverses the beginning of all things. Dante is within the orbit of the sacred scripture, where God is the creator, but the same principle of reversed movement can be associated with human creativity. (*SS*, p. 174)

Frye, in fact, appears to situate *The Divine Comedy* at a point where the world of man (romance) and the apocalyptic world (myth) come into contact, whereas most of

what we call romance tends to occur, with implicit allusions to its mythical bases, in the world of man and nature. But it is precisely, Frye suggests, through its allusive attempts to recreate the transition from an earth-centred to a God-centred universe that romance becomes 'man's vision of his own life as a quest'. It becomes, in other words, a metaphorical illustration of man's desire to transcend the order of nature and re-establish contact with the apocalyptic world from which he has fallen. In *The Secular Scripture*, Frye explains the principle further:

> Romance, the kernal of fable, begins an upward journey toward man's recovery of what he projects as sacred myth.... The end of fable, as the total body of verbal imagination that man constructs, brings us back to the beginning of myth, the model world associated with divine creation in Genesis. (*SS*, pp. 183 - 184)

> In traditional romance... the upward journey is the journey of a creature returning to its creator. In most modern writers, from Blake on, it is the creative power in man that is returning to its original awareness. The secular scripture tells us that we are the creators; other scriptures tell us that we are actors in a drama of divine creation and redemption... Identity and self-recognition begin when we realize that this is not an either-or question, when the great twins of divine creation and human recreation have merged into one, and we can see that the same shape is upon both. (*SS*, p. 157)

According to Frye, then, the apocalyptic inclination inhabits all romance which, through its ritual repetition of the quest, aspires to the same, if metaphorically reduced, aims and values which are accomplished, with apocalyptic clarity, in myth. Through its ordinance of archetypes, romance represents the verbal re-enactment of man's recovery of the omnific totality from which he has become separated. It is the linguistic passage of imaginative agency seeking to re-enter its source through the visionary utility of narrative. For it is the visionary utility of narrative, enabled

through the transcendental imperatives of metaphor, that comes, in the end, to define the cosmology of romance as we receive it through Frye.

Notes

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[1] Beer, *The Romance* (London & New York: Methuen & Co., 1970), p.4.
[2] Beer, *The Romance*, p. 4.
[3] Beer, *The Romance*, p. 50.
[4] Samuel Johnson in *The Rambler*, no. 4, 1750, in Beer, *The Romance*, p. 52.
[5] Beer, *The Romance*, p.132.
[6] Beer, *The Romance*, p. 66.
[7] Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance: Stevenson, Haggard, Kipling and Conan Doyle* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1998), p. 12.
[8] Beer, *The Romance*, p.10.
[9] Beer, *The Romance*, p.10.
[10] Beer, *The Romance*, p. 3.
[11] Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, pp. 13 - 14.
[12] Beer, *The Romance*, p.10.
[13] Beer, *The Romance*, p.3.
[14] Abrams, *Glossary*, p.25.
[15] Abrams, *Glossary*, p.132.
[16] Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 37.
[17] Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 224.
[18] It is necessary to point out at this stage that, in many instances, Frye uses the word 'poetry' to mean literature in general, and the word 'poem' to mean an individual literary work, with the aim of resolving the problem 'that there is no word for a work of literary art', an anomaly, says Frye, 'that I find particularly baffling'. Consequently, Frye tells us in the *Anatomy*, 'as often as I can, I use the word "poem" and its relatives by synecdoche, because they are short words' (p. 71).
[19] Carl Gustav Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 66.
[20] Jung, *Two Essays*, p. 65.
[21] Jung, *Two Essays*, p. 65.
[22] Elizabeth Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism: A Reappraisal* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 62.
[23] Carl Gustav Jung, *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 75.
[24] Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, p. 62.
[25] Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, p. 64.
[26] Jung, *The Spirit in Man*, p. 103.
[27] For a more extensive and detailed analysis, see Frye's 'Fictional Modes: Introduction', *Anatomy of Criticism*, pp. 33 - 35.
[28] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[29] Abrams, *Glossary*, pp. 224-225.

Chapter Two

The Cosmology of Romance II

The more we have explored Frye's literary cosmology, the more we have exposed the fact that it incorporates principles which, according to current theoretical trends, have become largely discredited. In the first place, it is blatantly patriarchal in retaining the rigid discriminations of the religious models it refers to (romance is the expression of 'man's vision of his own life as a quest': woman, presumably, trails in his wake). It is essentially structuralist in its design, albeit it outreaches the outmoded assumptions of structuralism with an even more outmoded insistence on narrative structure as a metaphysical mechanism. Its trans-historical totalisations and insistence on 'literature' as an independent category of writing are, in the aftermath of Foucault's concept of discourse, highly questionable, as are its tendencies to situate narrative outwith any immediate social, political, cultural or historical context. Ian Duncan, for one, questions Frye on these grounds, rejecting the concept of fiction as 'a shared cultural order distinct from material and historical contingency',[1] suggesting instead that, as opposed to expressing any outright critical currency, Frye reflects the characteristic mood of the age he belongs to: 'Frye's secular scripture, the totality of fictions, contains history as one of its effects: the view from a belated and ironic modernism that thinks it has nowhere to look but back, unless upward to an apocalyptic horizon'.[2] Elizabeth Wright has raised a similar objection, noting with doubt the tendency of Frye's theories towards 'transcending history': 'Where, for instance, does Frye consider the relation of the

epic hero of the quest to the feudal \ tribal warrior? Neither Jung nor he questions the expectations of social role which produce this kind of hero'.[3]

At the same time, we recognise the assiduity with which Frye, seemingly, appropriates literature to serve the ideological purposes of a Christian tradition, an alignment which, for a Marxist critic like Terry Eagleton, is too much to bear. 'The beauty of the approach is that it deftly combines an extreme aestheticism with an efficiently classifying "scientificity",' Eagleton concedes, but it 'maintains literature as an imaginary alternative to modern society while rendering criticism respectable in that society's terms'. Frye's literary cosmology 'is the work of a committed Christian humanist (Frye is a clergyman), for whom the dynamic which drives literature and civilisation - desire - will finally be fulfilled in the kingdom of God'. In other words, says Eagleton, 'Frye offers literature as a displaced version of religion. Literature becomes an essential palliative for the failure of religious ideology, and supplies us with various myths which are of relevance to social life'.[4]

That Frye's cosmology corresponds to and reflects a religious ideology is certain. Eagleton's complaints, however, are arguably misplaced, given the fact that most of European literature *has* been written under the conditions or conditioning of a society and culture formed according to a Christian ideology. Eagleton's remarks are tantamount to saying that Frye has superimposed a Christian belief system upon the whole of literature, whereas a good deal of that literature was written, precisely, with that belief system in mind, often to the point of deliberately promoting or upholding it. Eagleton is loathe to accept that when most of Western literature was conceived Christianity was far from being a failure: it was, until the nineteenth-century at least, the ideological mainstay of Western society. It is perhaps more

accurate to suggest that Frye is responding to that which in literature is self-evident, the expression of social and cultural values which coincide with and express (either unconsciously or consciously) a Christian point of view. Frye exposes the ideological framework at work; he does not enforce it. He embraces the teleological world-view; he did not create or imagine it.

Besides this, it is a mistake to delimit Frye's teleological world-view to a purely Christian ethos. What many critics have overlooked in the *Anatomy* are Frye's protestations against associating archetypal criticism with any one doctrine. Perhaps Frye's most rigorous denial of a Christian bias in his reasoning occurs in pages 125 - 128 of the *Anatomy*. The following extract is taken from these pages and is a good example of the argument waged:

> If Christianity wishes to identify the infinite Word and Man of the literary universe with the Word of God, the person of Christ, the historical Jesus, the Bible or church dogma, these identifications may be accepted by any poet or critic without injury to his work ... But they can never be accepted by poetry as a whole, or by criticism as such. The literary critic, like the historian, is compelled to treat every religion in the same way that religions treat each other, as though it were a human hypothesis, whatever else he may in other contexts believe it to be ... Coleridge was right in thinking that the "Logos" was the goal of his work as a critic, but not right in thinking that his poetic Logos would so inevitably be absorbed into Christ as to make literary criticism a kind of natural theology. (*AC*, pp. 125 - 126)

The figure of Christ, says Frye, must take its place among a plethora of redeemer-figures belonging, with equal efficacy, to the mythopoeic formulae of other cultures and other epochs. In *The Secular Scripture* he concentrates his theory on the Christian tradition, but not exclusively; even then, he tends to refer to archetypal variants or antitypes from, for example, the Greek and Icelandic traditions.[5] As Ian Balfour points out, meanwhile, in Frye's work the Bible 'is "anatomized" because of

its structure and influence as a text, not valued as a repository of doctrine'. Consequently, says Balfour, the 'charge... that Frye's theory of literature is a thinly veiled displacement of a theological or religious program turns out to be spurious...'.[6] Italo Calvino gives us greater scope in this respect when he speaks

> ...of a "cyclic" Frye (though it would be more exact to call him a describer of the cyclic concept of the world that literature has expressed) or of a "teleological" Frye (and we must not forget that this historian and geographer of human desire was a Protestant minister).[7]

Although Calvino voices similar reservations to Eagleton's as regards Frye's religious credentials, it is worth considering whether a 'teleological' Frye, as with a 'cyclic' Frye, cannot also be called a describer of the world that (Western) literature has expressed. This holds true, it appears, when we are dealing, specifically, with romance. With its characteristic quest structure and narratorial tendency towards revelational, redemptive or regenerative goals, romance, by definition, is teleological. If we take any example of romance and fit it into Frye's scheme, the effectiveness, even accuracy of the fit is impressive. We have seen this with examples as diverse as Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*. Frye's scheme retains its application in relation, at least, to mythopoeic formulae, in spite of the objections raised against it. Elizabeth Wright has raised a similar point in her discussion of Frye:

> ...Frye has made use of symbolic structures as they exist within western culture... His system provides a ready analytical tool by which a critic can make an approach to fantasy in literature. Even though his classification lacks the underpinning of a more fundamental theory, this does not mean that the fantasies do not have the image-structures he detects, only that they cannot be given the status of some numinous derivation from 'forces of nature'.[8]

Acting in his defence, then, we could say that Frye has provided a structural model of narrative based on the teleological concept of the world that has been expressed by literature. It is this, regardless of whatever religious connotations we attach to it, that stands as the absolute sanction of Frye's critical programme. In this sense, Frye is providing us with an institutionalised model of romance based on evidence accumulated from a structural reading: this reading shows in romance an adherence to western metaphysics which, itself, is part of the ideological framework of western civilisation.

Jacques Derrida has exploited the contradictions and paradoxes within such systems, and it will become necessary to refer to Derrida more fully as we go on. To undertake a retrospective application of post-structuralist principles that enable us to demonstrate the failure of logocentricism is one thing; but this does not alter the fact that a large proportion of narratives, in the event of their conception, presupposed, and continue to exhibit, a logocentric tendency (which means that Frye's theories, as a summary or description of what was intended, retain a valid aspect). What I wish to argue in this thesis, though, is that, if such a failure has become apparent, there ought to be points in the development of narrative where this failure has been admitted 'consciously'; that is, as the effect of an authorial awakening, where the author, emerging from his or her unconscious absorption of archetypal formulae, apprehends and exposes the failure of logocentricism prior to the interventions of latter-day theorists. Accordingly, I wish to suggest that it is possible to see such anomalies forming in the context of nineteenth-century romance, remembering that, if romance is the genre in which archetypes are most visibly expressed, it is also the medium in which the absence of an archetypal centre - the Logos - is most likely to reveal itself.

It is the medium in which the failure of the archetypal schema / logocentricity makes itself available to our descriptive faculties. Rather than simply devalue Frye's theories according to the means that supersede him, then, I wish to show that it is possible to look at examples of romance occurring prior to Frye which devalue his scheme prior to its conception. Frye, to some extent, may have described the world that literature has expressed and shown how this description is encrypted in the appropriate narrative models. What he does not describe are those areas where the 'appropriate' narrative models begin to articulate, deliberately (and paradoxically), the invalidity of the strategies that inform them. Consequently, it may become possible to say that the failure of logocentricism announces itself through Frye's failure to describe it. Above all, I hope to demonstrate how such issues are addressed and how they occur in Stevenson's essays and fictions. For it would be fair to say that, of all the authors in the nineteenth-century, Stevenson remains the principal exponent of romance theory and fiction. If romance is the genre in which the absence of an archetypal centre is most likely to reveal itself, then it is with Stevenson's romances, as romances *par excellence*, that we are likely to encounter this absence more readily.

There are various ways in which we could expose the inefficacy of Frye's anatomy. Any summary of the typical aims and strategies of poststructuralism, as I have said, would allow us to do that. However, in the remainder of this chapter, I wish to forge a variety of positions and principles which, as well as counter-acting Frye directly, allow us to establish a provisional grounds for a fuller analysis of Stevenson (given in the following section). These positions and principles are derived from several, seemingly disparate sources - from Edgar Allan Poe, from

Derrida (where appropriate), from contemporary critic Ian Duncan, and from Stevenson himself. Disparities notwithstanding, these sources, derived from before and after Frye's lifetime, are intended to go some way to bridging the idiomatic gaps that exist between the nineteenth and twentieth / twenty-first centuries, and to demonstrate the ways in which, as I have claimed, the deficiencies of logocentricism were recognised prior to Frye, as they are recognised now. It is my intention to provide a theoretical framework within which to situate Stevenson and, from there, to explore Stevenson's own accentuation of the positions and principles stated here.

Cosmological Inconstants: Edgar Allan Poe

One of the more puzzling ramifications of Frye's cosmology is that it sometimes relies as much on science as it does on anagogy to give it conceptual stability, to the point that science appears to offer a reliable structural model against which narrative (as anagogy) can be validated. We have already seen Frye's tendency to incorporate scientific principles as a means of reinforcing the teleological integrity of his scheme, so much so that in narrative structure we are presented with something like a metaphysical extension of the space-time continuum. From all this we can assume (remembering Abrams) that the 'interpretative' function of texts, as educed by Frye, ultimately involves the metaphysical transformation of external contingencies, whereby science itself, secured through analogies and metaphors, becomes contained and explained through the archetypal and anagogic process. With Frye we are effectively presented with literature as a scientifically viable mythical quest,

strengthened by its imaginative combination of the objects of mythology with the principles of science. Frye's 'scientificity', then, gives us good grounds for appropriating some of Edgar Allan Poe's ideas, as expressed in his scientific treatise *Eureka*, concerning the nature 'of the *Physical, Metaphysical and Mathematical - of the Material and Spiritual Universe; - of its Essence, its Origin, its Creation, its Present Condition and its Destiny*'.[9]

Poe's discussion provides insights which, in foreshadowing certain principles later expanded by Derrida, are, for our purposes, more immediately relevant than Derrida. They represent, that is to say, a nineteenth-century idiom and vocabulary which, not only takes us closer, as we shall see, to Stevenson, but also goes some way to proving the point that Frye's scheme was problematised prior to its conception. Using Poe in his capacities as a theorist, we find a set of ideas about origin and structure that raise a good many questions about the teleological world-view. In this sense, Poe's *Eureka* offers an elaborate prelude to Stevenson, who was influenced considerably by Poe and stands, perhaps, as Poe's worthiest successor. Poe, indeed, provides a highly relevant contemporary backdrop against which to situate Stevenson. He allows us to show that the issues we are dealing with were not confined to Stevenson alone, but to romance more generally, though it is through Stevenson's romances that we receive their greatest impact.

Given that Poe's *Eureka* has been acknowledged for its remarkably accurate hypotheses concerning the structure and ordination of the material universe, as we understand it from a twentieth-century perspective,[10] it is hardly surprising that, at the same time, it makes significant gestures towards a twentieth-century critical idiom. In this instance, Poe calls into question the conceptual identification between

the signifier and, what we would nowadays call, the 'transcendental signified' which, according to 'the language of metaphysics',[11] presupposes an immediate correspondence between word and thing as a basis for intelligibility and conceptual validation. Poe exposes the fact that traditional assumptions regarding the origin and structure of the universe, which rely, precisely, on transcendental significations, are inherently flawed. Such assumptions, he argues, are necessarily retracted from any solid foundation because of the inadequacy of language as a means of accessing the inaccessible 'presences' these assumptions refer to. It is the tendency of 'Man', however, because of the deficiencies of analytical method, to substitute the unaccountable with blank metaphors - words without directly interpretable meanings - or with signs, as Derrida describes it, which are 'secondary and provisional'[12] inasmuch as they are substitutes for the significations they (cannot) refer to. It is noticeable that some of the words and concepts Poe is calling into question have been acted upon by Frye as theoretical givens:

> Let us begin, then, at once, with that merest of words, 'Infinity'. This, like 'God', 'spirit', and some other expressions of which the equivalents exist in nearly all languages, is by no means the expression of an idea - but an effort at one. It stands for the possible attempt at an impossible conception. Man needed a term by which to point out the *direction* of this effort - a cloud behind which lay, forever invisible, the *object* of this attempt. A word, in fine, was demanded, by means of which one human being might put himself in relation at once with another human being and with a certain *tendency* of the human intellect. Out of this demand arose the word, 'Infinity'; which is thus the representative but of the *thought of a thought*.[13]

The substitution of the possible attempt of the sign for an impossible conception is a principle that inundates Frye's literary universe to the point that it is entirely grounded, not in the expression of an idea of the Logos, but in an effort towards one;

in other words, not in the thought of the Logos - which is beyond conception - but in the *thought of a thought* of the Logos (or 'infinity', 'God', 'spirit', or any of the words that Frye employs in validating his scheme). To prove the point - if we ask ourselves what Frye means by 'Logos', the answers are vague: it is 'the incarnate Word' (the word of 'God'?) or 'a single infinite and eternal symbol' (of what exactly?). It is 'the universal creative word which is all words' (but what does it mean?) or 'the shaping word which is both reason' and 'creative act' (emanating from who or what or where? What is its source?). The Logos, he implies, conveys 'an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than to being inanimate': but if it is not human, then what is it? It is clear that, in the context of Frye's theories, the word 'Logos' is a verbal substitution for a transcendental signification which cannot be located or 'literalised' through the linguistic means at our disposal. In attempting to define the Logos, Frye is forced to elicit further substitutions which can only defer rather than clarify its meaning. In this sense, Frye's version of structure refers to a point of origin and orientation from which it is necessarily removed through the limitations of the episteme: within his scheme, the Logos can only 'appear' as a blank metaphor, as a secondary or provisional sign for something it is not, as a signification for something it cannot signify.[14] 'Man needed a term by which to point out the *direction* of this effort', says Poe, and Frye has supplied a new one; but, like the other terms identified by Poe, it can only convey 'a cloud behind which lay, forever invisible, the *object* of this attempt.'

The status of the Logos as an effort towards an idea, rather than an idea in itself, is demonstrated by the fact that, within the context of narrative, it can only be

represented, not as an idea or a concrete thought, but as an endless series of archetypal analogues, or as metaphors which - like the word 'Logos' - are verbal substitutions for something they cannot signify. In the context of narrative, we recall, the Logos is expressed in 'anthropomorphic terms', as 'a universal man who is also a divine being' or a 'glorified hero'. But the glorified hero is an archetypal symbol, a metaphor, no less, for the Logos which is not the expression of an idea but an effort at one. We could say, then, that if the word 'Logos' represents the thought of a thought, the archetypal hero (as a metaphor for the Logos) represents the thought of a thought of a thought of the Logos. To see it this way, the archetype of the glorified hero takes us further away from that which it is meant to convey. The same is true of the mythopoeic formula as a whole. Through the archetype of the quest we are enabled a metaphorical accession to an omnific totality which, in being metaphorical rather than literal, is necessarily removed from the actuality of what it illustrates. In the structure of romance, and in the apocalyptic 'revelation' received through the attainment of the quest object, what we get is not a sense of cosmic revival, but a metaphorical gesture that implies, but cannot actualise, the material aspect of the unimaginable idea it refers to. In this sense, romance does not contain but cancels the event of revelation, while the individual examples of which romance consists, as an endless series of metaphorical abstractions, move us further away from, rather than towards, any 'origin or end, *arche* or *telos*'.[15] Ultimately, then, the Logos cannot be conceived through the archetype: the archetype enables, not the perception of the Logos, but the staggered perceptions of (never) perceiving it. As it does so, it takes us further away from the prospect of a centre and further away from the prospect of totality as a viable notion. In the end, the archetype itself cannot be seen as anything

other than an inherently unstable item, like a unit of language subject to 'play', where, in Derrida's terms, the 'absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely'.[16]

In place of the conceptualisation of the transcendental signified ('infinity', 'God', 'spirit') Poe locates an untranslatable space (or 'cloud') in which the frontiers of intelligibility are dissolved and the implied object of signification remains outside the range of significative possibility: it remains, as Derrida might put it, 'beyond the reach of play'.[17] This in itself is enough to destabilise Frye's analogous interpretation of a literary universe, reminding us of the contradiction in structuralist criticism (well noted by post-structuralists) that, in order to authenticate its structurality, structure depends on a centre which it cannot locate within itself.[18] Given that 'the notion of a structure lacking any centre represents the unthinkable in itself', Poe is able to show us what Derrida shows us a century or so later: that Frye is falling into the trap of attempting to ground the infinite play of 'structure' within 'a fixed origin',[19] that he is seeking to identify a necessary cause in the 'event' of structurality which regulates the 'infinite literary universe' by imposing on it an intelligible limit. Poe, in reference to the material universe, detects the absurdity of this way of thinking, recognising, as Derrida did, that the 'concept of a centred structure - although it represents coherence in itself, the condition of the *episteme* as philosophy or science - is contradictorily coherent':[20]

> 'The mind is impelled,' say the theologians and others, 'to admit a *First Cause*, by the superior difficulty it experiences in conceiving cause beyond cause without end.' ... And what is a First Cause? An ultimate termination of causes. And what is an ultimate termination of causes? Finity - the Finite. Thus the one quibble, in two processes, by God knows how many philosophers, is made to support now Finity and now Infinity....[21]

Frye's appeal to scientific method would appear to be 'always already' infected with a self-effacing paradox. He cannot conceive of an infinite distribution of narrative functions without limiting them to a finite cause or centre which they cannot accommodate.

The contradictory coherence of Frye's literary cosmology is such, then, that it is structured around its opposite quality, namely the absence of a structural centre and, so, the absence of any unified structurality. By the same token, seeing as the Logos cannot be revealed as an idea but only as an effort at one, romance can no longer be viable as the re-enactment of the loss and recovery of the ultimate ideological totem. At best, it can only postpone the exposure of its lack of structurality by sustaining its position as the metaphorical *thought of a thought*. The Logos can only be 'recovered' in symbols but cannot be conceived or actualised through the apocalyptic mediation of narrative, which ceases, then, to be apocalyptic. This way, a symbol (or archetype) - as a constitutive unit of anagogy - is increasingly condemned to itself. It cannot fulfil its metaphorical aim to become what it illustrates, nor can it occupy a space of apocalyptic disclosure in that it cannot achieve the literal status of the Logos *in itself*.

Altogether, Poe has given us the grounds for taking the converse position to Frye, which he himself alludes to, that without 'the still center of the order of words' then 'there is nothing to prevent the analogies supplied by convention and genre from being an endless series of free associations, perhaps suggestive, perhaps even tantalizing, but never creating a real structure'(*AC*, pp. 117 - 118). Going further than this, I wish to suggest that conventions are 'free' to the point of dissolving any trace

of association altogether, that they are an endless series of disassociations which eliminate the possibility of a literary totality and, with it, the analogous operations of conventional formulae. For without the means of association provided by the common denominator of the Archetype Proper, the 'archetype' cannot belong to anything other than the specific formation of a specific text. It no longer receives an associative value from the organic transmissions of a structural centre, to the point that the idea of the archetype becomes, essentially, a fallacy - that is, something which appears to but does not exist.

Later, we will see how these kinds of anomalies are revealed in Stevenson's writing. It is necessary to point out, though, that, thus far, we have continued to speak of structure as a trans-historical or trans-authorial region of activity. Until we step outside of any such context, we to some extent remain within the constraints of Frye's methodology. So far, in fact, we have simply inverted Frye's scheme to show how its principles of unity are founded on principles of disunity. To consider, however, the alternative position of narrative as a product of artificial, rather than organic, processes is to step outside of Frye's scheme altogether. And this is a possibility which presents itself when we turn to Ian Duncan who, once again, allows us to assemble principles that, in association with those of Poe, can be latterly applied to Stevenson. Through Duncan, moreover, we can begin to see how the discovery of the failure of conventional formulae, and of the ideological solutions which inform them, is a conscious one and one which becomes, through a writer like Stevenson, a 'structural' feature of the modern romance.

Frye's account of the relation of the author to the process of narrative production is an area that comes under the scrutiny of romance critic Ian Duncan. In looking at this, Duncan opens up certain positions which we can refer to Stevenson in the chapters that follow.

In Frye's case, literary structure occurs organically, naturally adjusting to conditions through time by means of displacement, maintaining an impervious order of conventions throughout the course of human history, regardless of authorial or cultural interactions. Structure, for Frye, is a self-contained and self-perpetuating network of archetypal associations that pre-exist and supersede the author and his work: the author's work is merely a microcosmic enhancement of the macrocosm of form or, as Frye has stated, 'an individual manifestation of the total order of words' (*AC*, p. 121). Frye's concept of displacement depends on a development of fiction where the role of the author is subordinated to the compositional and creative imperatives which inhabit literary form as a whole. In this sense, his theory of totality, as Terry Eagleton has noted, 'is scornfully "anti-humanist", decentring the individual human subject and centring all on the collective literary system itself'.[22] The author is merely a vehicle, Frye claims, for the eternal passage of archetypal form, a passive player in the emanation of conventions that, spread over and above time, provide a narrative framework prior to, and after, the author's involvement. 'In the context of process,' he suggests, 'the form becomes something more like the shaping spirit, the power of ordering which seems so mysterious to the poet himself,

because it often acts as though it were a separate identity from him' (*SS*, p. 35). The author of fiction, meanwhile,

> ...may seem to be making up his stories out of his own head, but this never happens in literature, even if the illusion of its happening is a necessary illusion for some writers. His material comes from traditions behind him which may have no recognized or understood social status, and may not be consciously known to the writer or to his public. (*SS*, p. 10)

Crucially, Ian Duncan has differentiated between the passive role assigned to the author by Frye and the role of the author, from within his or her cultural location, as a principal agent in the production of narrative. A difference emerges between the transcendental organicity of form and the self-conscious interventions of the author; or, in our case, between romance as 'an immanence of archetypes structuring those vast occult processes outside conscious agency'[23] and romance as a series of conscious innovations pertaining to a specific moment of cultural operation. In stressing the latter, Duncan is able to reconsider the effectiveness of Frye's interpretation of romance. Far from being an organic proliferation of originary symbols, romance is a cultural formation, a contrived generic category solidified, Duncan claims, in 'the formal version of romance established by Scott in his practice', described by Duncan 'as modern culture's construction of a symbolic form prior to itself'.[24] In the event of the novel, Duncan argues, romance is classified and asserted as an originary species of fiction, latently conceived as a historical 'tradition' through its absorption into the modern prose medium. It remains, however, an 'anterior' model of romance that has been constructed, rather than passively inherited, by Scott.

In exemplifying this, Duncan has taken Frye's idea of realism as a displacement of romance a stage further, and in such a way that leads him to negate the principle of displacement altogether. What Frye fails to acknowledge, say Duncan, is the degree of deliberation involved in the attempt to fashion a context for fiction: 'Realism is not a revelation of nature but a rhetoric and ideology: as Martin Price has written, "a deliberate - even militant - extension of form rather than the effort at literal representation or record" '.[25] In some ways, this corresponds to what Frye would say of realism, that it is simply a technical readjustment of form to an ideological preference for plausibility. But to emphasise 'conscious artifice and programme', says Duncan, 'is to correct dialectically Northrop Frye's theory of "displacement", which would make *romance* the revelation of nature - the eternal lineaments of the human - and "realism" one of its local precipitations'.[26] To acknowledge the role in fiction of authorial self-consciousness is to offer an alternative view to that of realism as the residual offspring of romance and romance, in turn, as the residual offspring of folklore and myth. Romance, argues Duncan, is 'local in the sense that it speaks to and from particular positions' so that, for us, 'romance must always be romance revival, meaning, not a synchronicity of archetypes across history but an active cultural work of the discovery and invention of ancestral forms, in other words the creation of the archetype as a rhetorical figure'.[27] Duncan attaches an artificial quality to the archetype that delimits its function *as* an archetype. It is no longer an imperative literary function, but a manufactured item. It is not so much an encoded point of reference that enables the 'proper' ordination of narrative structures as the product of a particular locality, subject to the quirks and innovations of authorial agency, as well as the historical and

cultural particularities of an author's place in time. Accordingly, the 'archetypal' structure is the invention rather than the trans-historical materialisation of 'a symbolic order prior to itself'.[28] As Duncan concludes, with further reference to Martin Price:

> The novelist needs to 'recreate the myth if he is to make full use of it', in a process that is allusive rather than vatic, not so much visionary as revisionary. The relationship of an individual work to a genre 'is not one of passive membership but of active modulation'.[29]

Hence, the tendency towards romance in fictions of the nineteenth-century, says Duncan, 'is not ... some kind of pupal shell the creature has failed to outgrow, but its living tissue of ethical, spiritual and ideological contention: the distinctive garment of its modernity'.[30]

Identifying the author and his or her location as central to the development of literary form is a principle that we can associate, emphatically, with Stevenson, who, as we shall see in the next section, emerges as an author of the active rather than passive variety (albeit, there are some intriguing alternatives offered by Stevenson as regards the local relations between the author and his / her use of language). The role of the author as self-conscious arbiter of fiction means, of course, that narrative structure is subject to a hitherto unconsidered and potentially disruptive influence which, in the end, forces us to reconsider the nature of structure as we have described it so far. Presently, though, Duncan's reference to the archetype as a rhetorical construction, rather than a residual symbol, needs to be more fully examined, both in terms of how it will relate to Stevenson's ideas and how it relates to those we have derived from Poe and Derrida.

In a review of Tom Hubbard's *Seeking Mr. Hyde: Studies in Robert Louis Stevenson, Symbolism, Myth and the Pre-Modern* (1995), Duncan launches an attack on, what he sees as, Hubbard's anachronistic application of the archetypal theorem. In the event, Duncan makes some points about the efficacy of the archetype as a recurrent narrative figure which, for our purposes, have some telling repercussions:

> The appearance of Jung [in Hubbard's text] formalises the problem, as it justifies the method of analogic association with the appeal to "archetypes". The archetype is rather like Marx's commodity fetish: it bestows a factitious agency on the rhetorical figure or image, and diverts critical attention away from the multiple, specific determinations that invest the act of cultural production. The Jungian scheme relies on an archaic (Platonic) model of signification, whereby meanings are produced by a radiance of essential forms transmitted through local signs or figures - not by the differential relations of those figures to one another, and to other semantic and grammatical elements, within a local, circumstantial utterance. Hubbard's title, *Seeking Mr. Hyde*, admits to the Jungian critic's interest in "the Hyde-figure" above the particular, material text, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, he may happen to inhabit; and the Hyde-figure turns out to be a shadow of something else, which can only be glimpsed by assembling a sort of fuzzy generic composite of all the Jekyll-and-Hyde-figures, Faust-figures, etc. the critic may lay his hands on.[31]

Duncan's summary of Hubbard's Jungian approach applies, of course, to Frye's adaptation of the archetype, which refers to Jungian psychology as one of its theoretical informants. Similarly, with Frye, the archetype can be viewed as essentially bogus, that is, as a false accession to analogical unity whereas, beyond the 'factitious agency' attached to the 'archetype', there is only particularity and difference. The principle is one that can be demonstrated quite easily. To take a former example, if we remove the 'messiah' value from Edmund Dantés (*The Count of Monte Cristo*) we are left, not with an analogue of the hero-figure as the mythical Christ, but a merchant sailor of Marseilles caught up in the political intrigues of

Napoleonic and post-Napoleonic Europe. Wrongfully convicted as a Bonapartist conspirator, Dantés exacts his revenge by learning to manipulate the modern capitalist economy, by infiltrating the Parisian aristocracy and by instigating the financial ruin of those responsible for his wrongful imprisonment and subsequent traumas. A story of capitalist decadence is played out against a background of colonial arrogance and corruption, with its characters evolving from the cultural, political and ideological matrix of the historical moment they belong to - or, rather, that Dumas belongs to. They emerge from and represent a circumstantial expediency, forming the structural and semantic crux of a narrative that issues its discrepancy against other narratives that, when brought together and viewed as a whole, emphasise the irregular juxtapositioning of disparate contexts, rather than a compact generic category.

Duncan draws attention to the problem, suggested by Poe, where the metaphysical value of the archetype is, as a consequence of the failure of the 'archaic (Platonic) model of signification', revealed as inadequate. Ultimately, the model of signification adapted by the archetypal critic is disabled by its inability to trace the source of 'a radiance of essential forms' that invests 'local signs and figures' with archetypal meaning. By the same principle as before, the idea of such a source (as an Archetype Proper or a series of archetypes at the centre of our literary experience) is problematised by its absence within the structure which it supposedly inhabits as an organising centre. It follows that, without a centre, conventions can only consist of endless variations which have no original template against which to validate their status as recurrent symbols - for it is recurrence that makes conventions conventional and there is nothing recurring here, except the divergent thoughts of an unthinkable

thought. Without an omnific bond between them, every 'archetype' must be seen as an imperfect duplicate of another so that no one narrative can be said to contain a series of archetypes in their pure or absolute condition, to the point that, properly speaking, there can be no such thing as an 'archetype'.

The archetype as an artificial item, therefore, becomes disassociated from its position as one among a series of conventional associations, estranged by its failure to meet an absolute model which exceeds conceivable limits. Likewise, narratives as a whole are recognisable for their combinations of local elements which, as an endless series of *dis*associations, are characterised not by uniformity but by multiplicity, not by metaphorical likeness or similarity but by specificity and difference. The concept of the archetype, as Duncan suggests, is purely a fallacy: it represents the necessary simplification of an insurmountable difficulty; or, as Poe might describe it, it betrays the critic's submission to the 'superior difficulty' of conceiving of infinity without a First Cause. In this respect, the idea of a 'conventional' formula as the basis for all romances becomes, itself, a kind of metaphorical fallacy, a figurative reduction of the immense diversity of literary forms to an abstract similarity. The archetypal critic presupposes a Model Proper which, like the Archetype Proper, is presumed to exist without appearing in itself, so that the conventions of romance, so called, converge upon nothing but the *thought of a thought* of what is conventional; while the archetypal structure, as a grammar of conventions, can only exist as a series of differential efforts towards an idea, not as an idea in itself.

The matter is compounded when we consider the exact delineation of the 'factitious agency' that Frye ascribes to archetypal functions, the meanings, that is,

with which they are invested as a whole; and these, we recall, adhere to the binary opposition of what is desirable / undesirable, apocalyptic / demonic, for / against the quest, and so on. This is as much to say, as Frye has inferred, that archetypes are metaphorical extensions of the moral postulates of good and evil (themselves recognisable as transcendental significations) so that, ultimately, Frye's scheme comes to rest in an ideological power-base which exists prior to and after the narratives that, supposedly, emerge from it. Narrative, in this sense, is dependent on external 'presences', moral absolutes that determine its structure prior to its event and which fashion narratives according to the formula of good triumphing over evil, leading to the apocalyptic disclosure of the Logos and the imagined accomplishment of an omnific totality. But we have seen that romances, as metaphorical abstractions of an absolute model, are illustrations of the absence of the Logos and that they are detached from any absolute foundation or centre. Romance, then, shows us that the moral designations it 'contains' are (without the validation of the Logos) lacking in foundation. These moral postulates, which are structured according to the concept of a centre, are effectively unhinged and, in themselves, are revealed as values without the efficacy of 'presence', no longer possible as an ordered series of positive significations that co-ordinate narratives substantively. Under such circumstances, romance 'contains' the absence of the moral determinations that are meant to determine its structure (or sustains them as illusions) and leaves itself open to alternative modes of determination.

To see the archetype as something resembling Marx's commodity fetish, meanwhile, is to view it as a kind of structural currency that imposes an illusory value over 'the multiple, specific determinations' that invest the text. Frye applies a

single value - 'good' or 'evil' - to endless variables without considering the contiguous functions of the text in isolation and, this way, reduces all narratives, past and present, to an analogous totality. This may lead us to conclude, in view of Duncan's remarks, that it is not the symbol in itself that is recurrent but the positive or negative value with which it is metaphorically associated. Remove the moral postulate from the symbol (as we have with Edmund Dantès) and it no longer becomes connected with other symbols, but becomes an isolated component within a particular narrative formation. When we rid ourselves of the oppositional dialectic of external 'presences', we find that symbols deemed similar or identical lose their common agency of likeness or identification, and are distinguishable for their specificity, locality and difference. To eliminate the oppositional value with which the archetype is factitiously endowed is to eliminate its stabilising property and, so, dissolve its 'conventional' association with those archetypes which 'share' its value.

If the antithetical moral framework is the means by which the archetypal framework sustains itself, then to eliminate these antithetical properties is to begin to dismantle the institutionalised model described by Frye. In romance, the suggestion that narrative is able to break out of its archetypal framework implies a dysteleological aberration of the integrity of the quest structure, which, as we shall see, is precisely what occurs in Stevenson's romances. Stevenson, in fact, draws attention to the referential incapacity of narrative to focus on teleological absolutes which are no longer ideologically viable. One of the ways in which he does this is to obliterate the moral designations which make such narratives possible as efforts towards an idea of the Logos. It is through such operations that an author like Stevenson is able to detach himself from the rigours of the tradition of romance -

albeit, these operations are not confined to his fictions alone. In the context of his essays, and even those, like the ones below, that do not deal directly with fiction, it is clear that Stevenson was formulating ideas which, as part of their effect, precluded the validity of the archetypal schema.

Analogies of Absence: Robert Louis Stevenson

This is not to deny that Stevenson, as we shall see in the chapter after this one, in many ways prefigures formalism and structuralism, approaches to fiction that invoke the conceptual anchorage of the Logos. In this sense, many of Stevenson's ideas, whilst they are remarkably innovative for their time, have, like Frye's, been superseded. At the same time, however, Stevenson undertakes significant twists in his essays which call into question both the logocentric tendency and the efficacy of conventional structures. In this sub-section, and by way of offering a preparatory grounds for the next chapter, I wish to demonstrate the strength of Stevenson's arguments against the totalisation of cultural phenomena, arguments which, beginning more generally (in referring to all aspects of human knowledge), are latterly refined in relation, specifically, to fiction. Remaining within the broader context of Poe, Derrida and Duncan, it is my present aim to elicit certain principles from the extracts provided below and to indicate the ways in which they might be referred to fiction, even while they do not relate directly to fiction here.

One of Stevenson's better known statements, from 'Crabbed Age and Youth', concerns the futility of the pursuit of absolute knowledge or significance, contending that

> ...[s]ince we have explored the maze so long without result, it follows, for poor human reason, that we cannot have to explore much longer; close by must be the centre, with a champagne luncheon and a piece of ornamental water. How if there were no centre at all, but just one alley after another, and the whole world a labyrinth without end or issue?[32]

The denial of an epistemological centre and the refusal to admit the possibility of a centre as an attainable object is a principle that inundates Stevenson's essays, to the point that it is applied to almost any area of human activity, as in the essay 'El Dorado':

> Happily we all shoot at the moon with ineffectual arrows; our hopes are set on inaccessible El Dorado; we come to an end of nothing here below.
>
> 'Of making books there is no end,' complained the Preacher; and did not perceive how highly he was praising letters as an occupation. There is no end, indeed, to making books or experiments, or to travel, or gathering wealth. Problem gives rise to problem. We may study for ever, and we are never as learned as we would. We have never made a statue worthy of our dreams. And where we have discovered a continent, or crossed a chain of mountains, it is only to find another ocean or another plain upon the farther side. In the infinite universe there is room for our swiftest diligence and to spare.
>
> It is true that we shall never reach the goal; it is even more than probable that there is no such place; and if we lived for centuries and were endowed with the powers of a god, we should find ourselves not much nearer what we wanted at the end.[33]

I wish to suggest that, in applying the same principle to fiction, Stevenson suffuses the teleological imperatives of romance, which he has inherited, with dysteleological imperatives, based on the absence of a centre, so as to construct romances which

generate a simultaneous impulse - a teleological / dysteleological 'impasse' which forms the structural and semantic crux of many of his most significant works. Romance aims towards goals that Stevenson, in many of his fictions, locates within an 'inaccessible El Dorado' or, in a comparative way, within an 'inaccessible silence'.[34] The object of the quest-romance, in being anagogically modified so as to 'appear' as the Logos, is 'revealed' by Stevenson as being confined to an untransalatable space that cannot be recovered through the 'visionary' utility of narrative or, indeed, through language as a whole. In Derridean terms, and in terms of that which we have extrapolated from Poe, we might say of the statements above that Stevenson is already preparing the grounds for eliminating the possibility of the transcendental signified as a metaphorically transferable object of narrative.

In expanding the theme, Stevenson challenges post-Enlightenment notions about the assimilation and classification of epistemological data, an effect of which is to undermine the proto-structuralist agenda of contemporaneous thinkers like Andrew Lang and J. G. Frazer. More broadly, Stevenson's critique of the effort towards a totalisation of (any branch of) knowledge constitutes something similar to Foucault's theory of 'discourse formations', where the assertion of knowledge / truth / meaning is not linear, established or universal, but localised, fleeting and eradicable:

> As we go catching and catching at this or that corner of knowledge, now getting a foresight of generous possibilities, now chilled with a glimpse of prudence, we may compare the headlong course of our years to a swift torrent in which a man is carried away; now he is dashed against a boulder, now he grapples for a moment to a trailing spray; at the end, he is hurled out and overwhelmed in a dark and bottomless ocean. We have no more than glimpses and touches; we are torn away from our theories; we are spun round and round and shown this or the other view of life, until only fools or knaves can hold to their opinions. We take a sight at a

> condition in life, and say we have studied it; our most elaborate view is nothing more than an impression.
>
> It is in vain to seek for consistency or expect clear and stable views in a medium so perturbed and fleeting. This is no cabinet science, in which things are tested to a scruple; we theorise with a pistol to our head; we are confronted with a new set of conditions on which we have not only to pass a judgement, but to take action, before the hour is at an end. And we cannot even regard ourselves as constant; in this flux of things, our identity itself seems in a perpetual variation; and not infrequently we find our own disguise the strangest masquerade.[35]

The term 'perpetual variation', above all, may act as a suitable description for 'the identity' of Stevenson's fictions. His narratives express fluctuation, multifariousness, randomness and uncertainty, the inability of narrative to ground itself in any fixed foundation or decidable network of values. In rejecting any quasi-structuralist approach to knowledge, history, philosophy, or whatever, Stevenson introduces a principle of discontinuity and difference, rather than continuity and similarity, which inhabits his romances with equal force.

In view of all that has been said, then, I wish to argue that it is the active discovery of the detachment of structure from any external foundation, origin or goal that, in the first instance, characterises romance of the modern idiom. It is an activity, if not initiated, then certainly epitomised by Stevenson, who marks the emergence of romance as 'modern' in the sense that it undergoes a detachment from its traditional or institutionalised bases. It is my aim to demonstrate Stevenson's construction of the archetype as an item deprived of its metaphorical potential or, more accurately, as an item constructed under the failure and erasure of its conventional values. Stevenson, that is to say, liberates the symbol or image from its moral prerequisites and shatters its association with anything outside of its immediate context. He offers a 'model' of romance which has become estranged from its mythopoeic site of origins and which

has ceased to retain the conventional criteria that have enabled its generic formation. Romance becomes, rather, a site of confrontation between the teleological imperatives that determine its structure and the emergence of dysteleological imperatives that initiate the collapse and re-orientation of the model of structure described by Frye.

The exact nature of these dysteleological imperatives will be revealed over the course of the following sections. For a final remark, however, it is worth suggesting that the development of a modern form of romance has its basis in factors attributable to fluctuations in the ideological milieu of nineteenth-century Europe. Frye has loosely associated his idea of displacement with 'changes in social context, rather than literary form'. What he appears to have overlooked is the extent to which there were changes in the nineteenth-century social context significant enough to cause, not so much a displacement within literature, as the 'rupture' or detachment of literary form from its mythopoeic origins. Such is the forcefulness of these adjustments in social context - impacting, largely, through Darwin in Stevenson's case - that it is possible to identify them as potential causes of a weakening or negation of the ideological criteria which inform the mythopoeic structure. This we can extend to include Eagleton's claim about the failure of religious ideology inasmuch as such a failure may have contributed to the dislocation of metaphysics more generally. Perhaps, then, we can begin to glean an understanding of the root causes of the unstable operations of conventions: namely, the inefficacious and invalid behaviour of the ideological referents which conventions refer to and 're-present' narratorially. Derrida, we notice, cautiously elects 'several "names", as indications only' of 'the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin,

everything became discourse ... that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences'; and lists as 'authors in whose discourse this occurrence has kept most closely to its radical formulation', 'the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics', 'the Freudian critique of self-presence', and 'the Heideggarean destruction of metaphysics'.[36] If philosophy and psychoanalysis undertook such radical formulations, it is reasonable to assume that 'literature' did the likewise, that it undertook its own radical formulations within the context of narrative and that it did so, perhaps, in terms that lay ahead of philosophy and psychoanalysis. And this is a prospect, as we shall see later in this thesis, tantalisingly expressed by Stevenson, for whom the 'tradition' of romance becomes a suitable vehicle for driving a wedge against the ideological imperatives that characterise its form and function.

Notes

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[1] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 2.
[2] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[3] Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, p. 65.
[4] Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell Publisher LTD, 1983), p. 93.
[5] See, for example, the many references to Greek mythology and literature in the opening chapters of *The Secular Scripture* or the references to the Icelandic Sagas on pages 11 and 116.
[6] Ian Balfour, *Northrop Frye* (Boston: Twane Publishers, 1988), p. 109.
[7] Italo Calvino, *The Literature Machine* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 53.
[8] Wright, *Psychoanalytic Criticism*, pp. 65 - 66.
[9] Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka*, in *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. Harold Beaver (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 220.
[10] The most recent mention I have found regarding the prefigurative scope of *Eureka* comes from the Italian newspaper, *La Republica*. In an article on *Eureka*, Pietro Citati writes:

> Con quale entusiasmo, Stephen Hawking avrà letto questi passi di Poe. Anche per lui il miracolo dell'universo sta in un gioco continuo di equilibri e di contrappesi tra le forze cosmiche: gioco esattissimo, perché un lieve spostamento di equilibri basterebbe a far esplodere l'organismo nel quale viviamo (With what enthusiasm Stephen Hawking must have read these passages of Poe. Also for him the miracle of the universe lies in a continuous game of equilibrium and counterbalance between the cosmic forces: a game most exact, because a slight change in the equilibrium would be enough to explode the

organism in which we live). Pietro Citati, 'Poe: Cosi ha Aperto le Porte dell'Universo' ('Poe: How He Opened the Door of the Universe), *La Republica*, August 21, 2001, p. 37. (Translation mine).

See also Harold Beaver's summary notation of *Eureka* in *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, pp. 400 - 402, which draws attention to how, at 'their broadest synthesis, Poe's Universe and Einstein's cohere' (p. 402).

[11] Jacques Derrida, 'Différance', in Rivkin and Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 397.

[12] Derrida, 'Différance', p. 392.

[13] Poe, *Eureka*, p. 222.

[14] Readers will recognise the distinctly Derridean tenor of this section of the chapter and, in particular, where it relates to Derrida's perception of a rupture in traditional ways of thinking about structure. We can see, for example, how Frye adheres to an idea of structure as famously called into question by Derrida in the essay 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences':

> ...structure - or rather the structurality of structure - although it has always been at work, has always been neutralised or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or of referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure - one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure - but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. By orientating and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form. And even today the notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable in itself. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences' (*Writing and Difference*), in Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (London and New York: Edward Arnold, 1989), p. 150.

Or, again:

> ...the entire history of the concept of structure, before the rupture of which we are speaking, must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix ... is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence - *eidos*, *arche*, telos, energeia, ousia (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth. ('Structure, Sign and Play', p. 151)

[15] Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', p.151.

[16] Derrida, Structure Sign and Play', p. 152.

[17] Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', p.151.

[18] Again, for more on this see Derrida's seminal critique of structuralism in 'Structure, Sign and Play'. In relation to the aporia that structure depends on a centre which it cannot locate within itself, Derrida remarks:

> As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which may of course be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. At least this permutation has always remained *interdicted* (and I am using this word deliberately). Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The centre is not the center. ('Structure, Sign and Play', p. 150)

[19] Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', p. 150.

[20] Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', p.150.

[21] Poe, *Eureka*, pp. 223-224.

[22] Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, p. 93.
[23] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[24] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 11.
[25] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[26] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[27] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[28] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 11.
[29] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[30] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 5.
[31] Ian Duncan, review of Tom Hubbard's *Seeking Mr. Hyde: Studies in Robert Louis Stevenson, Symbolism, Myth and the Pre-Modern* and Alan Sandison's *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, in *Scottish Literary Journal*, supplement no. 46, Spring 1997, pp. 31 - 37.
[32] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Crabbed Age and Youth', *Virginibus Puerisque and Other Essays in Belles Lettres* (Tusitala Edition, 1924), p. 49.
[33] Robert Louis Stevenson, extracts from 'El Dorado', *Virginibus Puerisque*, pp. 82 - 86.
[34] The expression is Art Berman's taken from his summary of Derrida in *From New Criticism to Deconstruction: The Reception of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 202.
[35] Stevenson, 'Crabbed Age and Youth', pp. 43 - 44.
[36] Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play', pp. 151-152.

Part Two

The Genealogy of Romance

Chapter Three

The Genealogy of Romance I

As a description, Frye's theory of romance appears a valid one, even if we can, as in the previous chapter, theorise against it with equally valid, more powerful or more fashionable arguments. It is only when we attempt to put it into practice against an author like Stevenson, himself one of the most enthusiastic practitioners of romance in recent centuries, that we begin to find an immediate, as opposed to a strategic, disqualification of the narrative model Frye has described. That is to say that, where Foucault and Derrida, as revisionary scholars, theorists and philosophers, strategically counter-describe Frye's descriptions, an author like Stevenson, as a producer of the literature Frye is describing, is already problematising Frye's totalities prior to their conception and prior to their moment of being described. Stevenson is active from the outset and 'interior' of (his) fiction, engaged in its production rather than its delayed absorption through critical means. As an author, he inhabits a creative moment: he looks, not from the retrospective critical periphery, but from the instantaneous crux of a textual operation. He is engaged in a process, not of describing literature, like Frye, but of inscribing (a part of) literature. As he does so, I wish to demonstrate in the next section, in relation to *Will o' the Mill* and *The Ebb-Tide*, he purposively inscribes the failure of Frye's literary totality by enabling the dislocation of the archetypal analogues that Frye has asserted as central to it. But Stevenson is also, in his own right, a critic and theorist, like Frye or Derrida and Foucault; and this is an aspect of his work, as Glenda Norquay has pointed out,

which has 'tended to become "background" to his own novels'.[1] Stevenson's critical essays, in fact, have been drastically overlooked and are in need of much further scrutiny if we are to fully comprehend his fictions. This section, then, will concentrate mainly on Stevenson's role as a critic and theorist in order to illustrate the ways in which his creative activity is simultaneous with a theoretical activity which invests his fictions with a strategic implementation and denial of formulaic modes. We have already seen how Stevenson, in relation to a wide variety of subjects, has theorised his rejection of traditional, classical or conventional notions of understanding and analysis. Bearing this in mind, we can begin to see how these ideas are applied within the context of those essays that deal directly with fiction.

Firstly, though, it is necessary to offer a context for Stevenson in terms of how he has been canonically located and received, an issue which, in Stevenson's case, is absurdly problematic. The variety of responses which Stevenson provokes among both his auditors and detractors is evidence of a certain ambiguity about his writing which implies, in turn, a form of writing that eludes description. And this perhaps is the earliest evidence of what is being suggested above, that Stevenson's canonical and critical obscurity belies a mode of romance that disrupts the generic model made available through established critical media. Having said this, this section will show where Stevenson's theories on romance coincide with, as well as differ from, those of Frye. Admitting already, then, a certain ambivalence towards Stevenson's work, we encounter one of the major stumbling blocks critics are faced with in dealing with Stevenson: the question, in other words, of whether he exemplifies a mainstream tradition or whether he is responsible for introducing a 'deviant' strain of narrative activity. As we shall see, it is not unproblematic to

suggest that Stevenson represents neither of these, or both; for it is a characteristic feature of his writing that it incorporates a number of incompatible phenomena with simultaneous precision. Beginning with a summary of Stevenson's position in the canon, it is possible to see how this principle of simultaneity takes root as a characteristic condition of romance as a modern idiom.

A Canonical 'Deviant': Robert Louis Stevenson

Given his tendency to drift, piratically as it were, from one genre to another, it is difficult to know where to begin with a writer like Stevenson. In our belated, if still uncertain, recognition of his significance, it is tempting, like Alan Sandison, to squeeze him alongside his 'elect' contemporaries and successors as a forerunner or instigator of an early-Modernist ethos and to insist upon the precedent 'that Robert Louis Stevenson's work has, in Gertrude Stein's phrase, "a future feeling" highly compatible with Modernist sentiments'.[2] Sandison certainly has a point here.[3] There is no question of the influence on Modernism of Henry James, Stevenson's most notable critical sparring partner; nor of Stephane Mallarmé, whose reference to Stevenson as '*un maitre*' speaks for itself. Yet Stevenson's value as a writer remains vaguely diminished in comparison to these, his admirers, whose inclusion among 'the first generation of truly modern writers' is unquestioned (Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane cite James and Mallarmé as being among these).[4] And here we encounter one of the first among many incongruities in attempting to fashion a context for Stevenson: that he has eluded the bracket of Modernism within which

writers like these, notwithstanding their diversity, have been bracketed, writers with whom he can be easily, even personally, associated.

Mostly, Stevenson has been cast away as a writer of 'perilous adventures' who wrote, said George Moore in 1897, 'with the brain of a boy and the imagination and perceptions of the meticulous eighteenth century';[5] and this is a matter which Sandison, among others, is keen to redress. The inappropriate description of Stevenson as a writer of adventure stories is not, of course, entirely inappropriate. *Treasure Island* as yet remains the definitive 'boy's-own' adventure yarn, so much so that even Stevenson's auditors, Robert Kiely among them, are apt to make remarks on how 'Stevenson, it was true, was capable of taking the adventure story in its conventional, almost sub-literary, sense as a mode in which change for its own sake was uppermost; motion counted more than direction, physical action overshadowed interior motivation'.[6]

That Stevenson often drew upon conventions is not to be denied, and is of crucial importance to this thesis. But Kiely's apologetic gesture towards conventions and the conciliatory notion of Stevenson's 'sub-literary' capabilities constitute a typical prejudice often raised against Stevenson - that he cannot be taken seriously because he was a writer 'merely' of adventure stories. This is a serious misconception on Kiely's behalf and does nothing to enhance our understanding of the author to whom he extends his critical sympathies. It occludes, in the first instance, what is more accurately the case: Stevenson's ability to maximise the appeal of his fictions through an expert manipulation of 'sub-literary' materials. In the second instance, it indirectly condemns to irrelevance those fictions which aspire to be romances and which, in transcending their representational obligations, seek an

uninhibited accession, says Stevenson, 'to certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man'(HR, p. 174).

Kiely confines himself to a hollow schematics wherein this or that narrative tendency is automatically endowed with this or that positive / negative value. Read from an Aristotelian perspective of mimetic probability, there are obvious excesses in a text like *Treasure Island*. No one, certainly not Stevenson, would dispute its emphasis on action rather than, what he would call, 'the passionate slips and hesitations of the conscience'(GR, p. 153). But to undermine Stevenson's status along these lines is to extort from his merits a further, and unnecessary, incongruity. As much is expressed by Alistair Fowler, in his essay 'Parables of Adventure: The Debatable Novels of Robert Louis Stevenson', when he contends that

> ...those who find high quality in Hawthorne or Melville should experience no difficulty in recognising the genius of Stevenson's romantic, un-novelistic stories... In speaking of romances and tales, questions of character, or of authorial omniscience, will often be crassly impertinent. Who would be so generically idiotic as to question the probability of Poe's *MS Found in a Bottle*? Yet to be less idiotic about stories that are not novels may call for critical methods of a new sort. We need a new way, in short, of talking critically about effects of pure narrative.[7]

It is one of the aims of this thesis to evoke such alternatives, to apply, that is, a more satisfactory method of criticism in assessing Stevenson's preoccupation with 'pure narrative'. For it is a preoccupation that pervades the full range of his work, to the point that it becomes his vocation as a writer.

To claim as much is to forge revisionary associations between Stevenson and literary theorists and practitioners of our own epoch. It is possible, for example, to think of Stevenson's ideas as a prelude to those of Roland Barthes,[8] albeit

Stevenson's scope is limited to a nineteenth-century idiom and vocabulary. But what is said of Barthes by Susan Sontag, that his 'writing, with its prodigious variety of subjects, has finally one great subject: writing itself',[9] could, perhaps, be said of Stevenson. Glenda Norquay's collection, *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, goes some way to proving the point, revealing the extent to which Stevenson's essays 'explore fiction-making: what makes for a good or bad book; the ways in which writers, including himself, work; the nature of literary realism; the influence of childhood reading on the adult mind; and the importance of the imagination for both writers and readers'.[10]

It is our general failure to acknowledge Stevenson's theoretical capacities which has resulted in his being relegated to some peripheral back burner of critical opinion. Stevenson flashes through our minds in the image of some populist puppetmaster, shamelessly pulling the strings of our infantile zeal for gratuitous adventures, only occasionally materialising as something more definite (most recently through the efforts of Sandison, Norquay, Vennessa Smith and Penny Fielding). Such a remark as Kiely's panders to this image, and is likely to blur our already blurred appreciation of Stevenson's work, the bulk of which prodigiously outweighs the more 'conservative' adventures. Stevenson can certainly be associated with a nineteenth-century adventure tradition which, in being perpetuated and generically abridged by Marryat, Haggard and Kipling, provided a highly popular mainstream. But in this respect he differs little from Joseph Conrad. In many ways, in fact, Conrad can be seen as adhering to the adventure trend, for, as David Thorburn points out, 'exotic settings,' 'abductions,' 'bizarre characters,' 'duels, hand to hand combat, natural catastrophe, extreme physical suffering, violent death - all

the blood and thunder of the traditional narrative of outside adventure - are the very substance of Conrad's novels'.[11] It is for this reason that Thorburn is keen to express: 'The critics of our time have tended to ignore or at best minimise what Conrad's reviewers understood to be crucial: that the author of *Lord Jim* had a great deal in common with Robert Louis Stevenson'.[12]

To anyone familiar enough with Stevenson, Thorburn's revelations are hardly surprising, albeit they are in need of being reversed. Thorburn is suggesting that Conrad has much in common with an adventure tradition epitomised by Stevenson. That may be true. What is more to the point, though, is where Conrad shares a common strain with Stevenson in transcending the adventure scenario. Indeed, in contextualising Stevenson comparisons with Conrad are inevitable. And this brings us back to the question concerning the orientation of Stevenson's fictions as a *modern* phenomenon, in that they may or may not correspond to Conrad's highly defined Modern*ist* agenda.[13] There are, in fact, fundamental differences between Conrad and Stevenson which, while they appear to substantiate Conrad's Modernist credentials, put Stevenson, canonically, at an unstable variance. These differences - or anomalies peculiar to Stevenson - consist of a tendency, in him, to resist any linear fictional programme, to reject any regular application of theme or credo, and to exhibit a rampant eclecticism which, says Ian Campbell, produced 'a great variety of kinds, some of which he invented or mixed creatively'.[14] This presents a sharp contrast to the serial ingredients of Conrad's tales, which amount, in effect, to a critical index of Modernist themes (futility, suicide, nihilism, nothingness, madness, isolation, and so on). Conrad's index of themes, moreover, is indicative of a long-term programme which forms a compact body of fiction out of individual works, so

that the matter of accounting for Conrad, canonically, is simplified by his generic and thematic consistency.[15]

Categorising and cataloguing Stevenson's work, however, is a much more tenuous business. To implicate his similarities with Conrad, or rather Conrad's similarities with Stevenson, should be enough to vanquish any doubts about his Modernist qualifications. The moral and ethical dystopia of *The Ebb-Tide* bears all the hallmarks of the Conradian (mis)adventure; while such instances as Darnaway's demented outcry in *The Merry Men* - 'the horror - the horror o' the sea!' (*The Merry Men and Other Tales*, p. 16) - have obvious textual resonances. And if these comparisons seem somewhat superficial we might refer to Penny Fielding's incisive chapter on *The Master of Ballantrae* which shows how closely the 'journey away from Scotland prefigures that of Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*'.[16] From beginning to end, their work can be seen to progressively and, in Conrad's case, regressively overlap. It is interesting to think of how Stevenson's career, beginning with *Treasure Island*, culminates in a work like *The Beach of Felasá*, which he tellingly describes as

> ...the first realistic South Sea story; I mean with real South Sea characters and details of life. Everybody else who has tried, that I have seen, got carried away by the romance, and ended in a kind of sugar candy sham epic, and the whole effect was lost - there was no etching, no human grin, consequently no conviction.[17]

Had Stevenson lived long enough to see the ways in which Conrad developed the South Seas theme, he would surely have approved.[18] And Conrad did continue the theme, until his untimely 'relapse' into the realms of 'sugar candy sham epic' which mars some of his later writing. Stevenson's remark on a misguided literature of the

South Seas might easily refer to Conrad's later attempts to write romances, for the most part stunning failures, like *The Arrow of Gold* (1919), *The Rover* (1923) and the flawed collaboration with Ford Madox Ford, the injudiciously titled *Romance* (1903). For it would be true to say that, in producing such tales, Conrad regressed into a literature more in keeping with an outmoded nineteenth-century adventure tradition, of a kind perfected and only occasionally championed by Stevenson. It is worth noting 'the fact that in working on *Romance* Conrad had the author of *Treasure Island* firmly in mind'.[19] It is testimony to the talents of Stevenson that he should succeed where Conrad and Ford, writers of considerable ability, should fail outright. It is all the more bewildering to note that Conrad's reputation remains largely unaffected by the failure of his later romances (his reputation as a Modernist having been settled by the insight and originality of his earlier material); while Stevenson's has been blighted by the *success* of his earlier romances which, to some extent, have obscured the significance of his later works (the insight and originality of which has been largely overlooked). Conrad can in many ways be seen as Stevenson's natural successor, even if, as Richard Curle remarks, Conrad (rather jealously perhaps) 'always spoke, apart from his book on the South Seas, with aversion to Stevenson, whom he regarded as an artist of small account'.[20] It is a further irony that 'Flaubert, Mallarmé and Henry James are the greatest influences on Conrad...',[21] while Stevenson, himself an influence on Mallarmé and James, is stoutly rebuked.

This, though, goes some way to explaining the ambiguity of Stevenson's position in the canon. For there has been a tendency to ignore the implications of Stevenson's work apart from *Treasure Island*, and to overlook what was apparent to

his immediate auditors, that in a book like *The Master of Ballantrae*, as Andrew Lang defined it, it is 'a very modern gloom that broods over the roof-tree of Durrisdeer'.[22] The problem for Stevenson, and the reason, probably, why he has never maintained a 'serious' status, lies in what followed after his death: that is, the expulsion of Stevenson from a Modernist aesthetic at the hands of those, like George Moore and Conrad, who contributed to its development. It is well known, and need hardly be reiterated here, that Stevenson suffered posthumously at the hands of an elite Modernist literati, and that the declamation he received, in being labelled a writer of gratuitous adventures, is something from which he has never fully recovered. Thus when we come to hazily define the notion of Modernism as 'a Great Divide between past and present, art before and art now',[23] we find that Mallarmé, James and Conrad fall on this side of its radical mainstream, while Stevenson, in spite of his historical proximity, is confined to its 'prehistoric' past. It is therefore understandable that Sandison should seek to confer upon Stevenson, through the mists of ignorance surrounding his work, some lasting measure of credibility, and to secure for him some kind of 'serious' status among the higher tiers of the Modernist forum.

This, however, is as if to say that without the title of Modernist, Stevenson is destined to remain a canonical non-entity. To label Stevenson with outright finality, in fact, as Sandison does, might arouse our suspicions. For we cannot lose sight of the fact of Stevenson's annulment from any institutionalised (i. e. textbook) summary of Modernism. Nor can we ignore the facts as expressed, somewhat crudely, by Kiely, that Stevenson was capable of appropriating the most conventional means of story-telling. In short, Sandison overplays the Modernist card. He is so keen to

establish Stevenson's Modernist credentials that he omits or suppresses what is a vital aspect of Stevenson's work - namely, his staunch advocacy of romance, both as a genre and a principle, and his insistence on the conventions of romance as reliable structural criteria. It is with this in mind that we draw attention to a contradiction in Sandison's argument:

> So Stevenson, stressing in his own work the importance of the abstract, of artifice and the repudiation of old conventions, illustrates well what Bradbury and MacFarlane contend to be part of any working definition of Modernism, namely 'a quality of abstraction and highly conscious artifice, taking us behind familiar reality, breaking away from familiar functions of language and form'.[24]

Sandison may be right in attributing some of the defining characteristics of Modernism to Stevenson, but in his eagerness he loses sight of some of the defining characteristics of Stevenson himself - most crucially his expressed reliance on conventions as an effective material for writing:

> But again, we are rather more tempted to admit those particulars which we know we can describe; and hence those most of all which, having been described very often, have grown to be conventionally treated in the practice of our art. These we choose, as the mason chooses the acanthus to adorn his capital, because they come naturally to the accustomed hand. The old stock incidents and accessories, tricks of workmanship and schemes of composition (all being admirably good, or they would long have been forgotten) haunt and tempt our fancy, offer us ready-made but not perfectly appropriate solutions for any problem that arises, and wean us from the study of nature and the uncompromising practice of art. (NR, p. 73)

Sandison's comment, moreover, is given in response to a sequence of analogies made in 'A Humble Remonstrance' where Stevenson, in crossing swords with Henry James over the representational capacities of fiction, contends:

> The arts, like arithmetic and geometry, turn away their eyes from the gross, coloured and mobile nature at our feet and regard instead a certain figmentary abstraction... Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as making them typical ... A proposition of geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition of geometry is a fair and luminous parallel for a work of art. Both are reasonable, both untrue to the crude fact; both inhere in nature, neither represents it. (HR, pp. 172 - 174)

For Sandison, this amounts to evidence of Stevenson's repudiation of old conventions. More accurately, it expresses Stevenson's distrust of 'new' ones, those, he senses, which are ushering fiction towards the 'photographic exactitude' of 'realism', those, in short, which have 'made us turn our back upon the larger, more various, and more romantic art of yore' (NR, p. 70). An author is hardly going to adhere to a premise of making stories 'typical' by repudiating old conventions, nor by abandoning the familiar functions of language and form. The opposite stands that in writing, for example, *Treasure Island* Stevenson sought to produce an 'elementary novel of adventure' (HR, p. 176), admitting, without apology - and in retribution of a growing tendency to 'write the novel of society instead of the romance of man' (HR, p. 182) - that

> ...while it is true that neither Mr. James nor the author of the work in question [Stevenson himself] has ever, in the fleshy sense, gone questing after gold, it is probable that both have ardently desired and fondly imagined the details of such a life in youthful day-dreams; and the author, counting upon that, and well aware (cunning and low-minded man!) that this class of interest, having been frequently treated, finds a readily accessible and beaten road to the sympathies of the reader, addressed himself throughout to the building up and circumstantiation of this boyish dream. (HR, p. 176)

Clearly, Stevenson is expressing his intention to *re*-familiarise his readership with the established functions of language and form.

It is not altogether fair to invalidate Sandison on these grounds. Some of what he infers from Stevenson certainly hits the mark, especially where he emphasises Stevenson's acutely self-conscious approach to narrative production. (Indeed, Stevenson's unabashed acknowledgement of his use of conventions, given in such self-deprecating tones, is accompanied by intimations of the failure of conventions to produce 'perfectly appropriate solutions for any problem that arises'. His self-consciousness is such that there is a certain playfulness about his writing[25] and with it, we suspect, an ulterior motive - to introduce conventional formulae if only to expose their limitations and exploit them accordingly). Nevertheless, it will be argued here that Sandison, like Kiely, has failed to strike a balance in contextualising Stevenson's fiction. The fact that Stevenson was capable both of taking 'the adventure story in its conventional, almost sub-literary, sense' (Kiely) and of repudiating 'the old conventions' of 'language and form' (Sandison) presents an obvious contradiction. To correlate the assessments of Kiely and Sandison, then, is to forge an unusual discrepancy, a kind of conceptual crack, which, in itself, can probably do more to improve our understanding of Stevenson than anything else.

To examine this contentious middle space is to put Stevenson at an awkward variance with Modernism. On the one hand we are dealing with an author of immense originality and, on the other, with an author who allies himself to the requirements of 'the tradition'. The situation presents itself that Stevenson had an odd capacity for combining innovation with conservatism, and this might prompt us to think of Victor Shklovsky's adage - that 'every work of art comes into existence as a parallel and a contrast to some sort of model'[26] - as a reasonable motto for Stevenson. One of the outstanding conclusions we can draw from this (in mentioning

Shklovsky) is that Stevenson possessed a precursory tendency towards formalist and structuralist methodologies. This is intimated by Sandison when he emphasises the degree of self-consciousness shown by Stevenson as regards his art. This, as Sandison suggests, often leads Stevenson to expose the artificiality of fiction. But exposing the artificiality of fiction is not the same as a repudiation of conventions (which is how Sandison seems to see it). It demonstrates, rather, the kind of awareness shown by twentieth-century exponents of formalism and structuralism who, far from repudiating 'the old conventions', sought a direct involvement with the functional 'interior' of narrative; or, to put it another way, it demonstrates the kind of awareness shown by a proto-structuralist like Frye. It is by the same token that, contrary to Kiely's assumptions, Stevenson's expressed adaptation of conventions was far from being a naive administration of tried and tested strategies: it was a deliberate activity, pursuing the deliberate aim of entering, intimately, into an advanced understanding of fiction.

In the following sub-sections of this chapter, I wish to gauge the extent of Stevenson's proto-structuralist tendency in comparison to Frye's. However, in order to gain a preliminary understanding of Stevenson's structuralist bent - in contradistinction to Frye's - we can turn to Stevenson's reliable contemporary, Henry James. In the following summary, James applies something resembling Shklovsky's dictum to Stevenson in the same way that we have applied it. In doing so, he unwittingly draws attention to a fundamental difference between Stevenson and Frye: '[Stevenson] makes us say, Let the tradition live, by all means, since it was delightful; but at the same time he is the cause of our perceiving afresh that a tradition is kept alive only by something being added to it'.[27] This observation is at a

crucial variance with Frye's interpretation of 'the tradition'. James implies that, while Stevenson is an upholder of the tradition, he is also an expert manipulator of the tradition: he is a causal impetus in the manufacture of form who, ultimately, enables it to perform its function, but only after a creative interim where he has subjected 'the tradition' to authorial (or local) modifications. This is a phenomenon, as we have seen, which is disqualified by Frye, within whose scheme the author is subject to the overriding determinations of the archetypal order. But Stevenson, as will be revealed in this chapter, goes further than James's panegyric offering suggests. He allows the tradition to live, but only inasmuch as it can be revealed as inherently unsustainable, as something which does not 'live' as such, but which is subject to the determinations of its localised production. With his awareness of conventions, Stevenson clearly has something in common with Frye, but we must come to a point where Stevenson transcends Frye's way of thinking by demonstrating his place, as Ian Duncan might put it, in a process of 'active modulation'. It is something of a paradox that, having revealed the extent to which Stevenson operates within conventional modes, we begin to acknowledge his attempts, not to repudiate but, on the one hand, to trace them to their very origins and, on the other, to carry them beyond their recurrent or regular functions. I wish to argue, precisely, that it was by entering into and manipulating conventions, not by repudiating them, that Stevenson was able to create a romance of the modern idiom, a form of romance which detaches itself from its conventional or traditional bases by exposing the invalidity of the bases it relies on. As a consequence, we shall see that it is inappropriate, after all, to label Stevenson a proto-structuralist with any finality, in that he as often acts beyond the rigours of the structuralist method.

In describing his position, I wish to invoke, first of all, some remarks made about Stevenson by one of his most distinguished admirers, Italo Calvino. Adapting Calvino's terms, given at the start of the following sub-section, we can begin to think of two opposing zones of narrative operation - one referring to Frye's idea of an envisaged order of conventions (which I will call, after the manner of Calvino, 'the invisible text') and the other referring to narrative as we actually receive it (which I will call 'the visible text'). Of these, the invisible text relates to the archetypal order which is presumed to exist but which, to re-apply Poe's terms, never materialises as an idea in itself (but only as an effort at one). The visible text, meanwhile, refers to narrative as a linguistic construct which, as a condition of itself, is subject to the limitations of the linguistic system and which imposes, therefore, a material limit on the production and function of narrative structure. This distinction, summarised now, will become more important as we go on and, in particular, when we come to focus primarily on Stevenson.

The Invisible Text

Italo Calvino, paying homage to Stevenson in the preface of *Our Ancestors*, offers a useful key to unravelling Stevenson's fiction. The extent to which Calvino was influenced by Stevenson is summarised in the following sketch:

> Among the writers I have always read and, willy-nilly, have taken as a model is R. L. Stevenson. This is because Stevenson himself wrote the books he would have liked to read, because he, who was so delicate an artist, imitated old adventure stories and then relived them himself. To him, writing meant translating an invisible text containing the

> quintessential fascination of all adventures, all mysteries, all conflicts of will and passion scattered throughout the books of hundreds of writers; it meant translating them into his own precise and almost impalpable prose, into his own rhythm which was like that of dance-steps at once impetuous and controlled.[28]

Stevenson's expertise in the effective use of conventions is such that Calvino situates him centrally within something like an archetypal order. Importantly, though, Calvino is adamant that Stevenson's translation of the invisible text is superseded, in its transition from invisible to 'visible' status, by stylistic nuances which are peculiar to Stevenson alone. Calvino sees in Stevenson a form of writing which inheres in the romance tradition while at the same time as remaining outside of it. Through its phase of enunciation, the text begins to function independently of the conventions it translates: there is a point of separation between the (invisible) thought of the story as part of a literary totality and the (visible) actualisation of the story as the concrete *thought of the thought* it represents. Calvino assigns a role to the author whereby the translation of the quintessential fascination of all adventures undergoes an idiolectic transformation. He allows for a material phase of narration where the conventional is subsumed by the specific, where the universal totality of fiction gives way to the idiolectic specificity and creative management of the author.

This passage is enough to indicate the fundamental similarity and difference between Stevenson and Frye. On the one hand, Calvino recognises Stevenson's - like Frye's - apprehension of an order of conventions that informs the whole of fiction. But, on the other, he recognises the significance of style and, in this way, reflects Stevenson's own preoccupation with and insistence on style as the final determinant of narrative form and function. With Stevenson, that is to say, the question of style is not solely limited to 'the manner of linguistic expression'.[29] As we shall see,

Stevenson's theorisation of style includes an exploration of the material processes of narrative production and the problems pertaining to the actualisation of the invisible text or idea of structure through the visible utility of language. These deliberations eventually lead Stevenson to establishing a theory of narrative grounded in the operations of idiolect where the author is working through a genealogical, as opposed to a cosmological, frontier of narrative development. And this is a matter which we will begin to explain and explore more fully after the following comparison between Stevenson and Frye.

We have already seen how Stevenson has prefigured Frye in matters relating to realism and romance and in identifying the conventions of romance as reliable structural criteria. It is worth expanding on some of these prefigurations in order to show the full extent to which Stevenson anticipates Frye. Frye's arguments concerning the representational condition of fiction, for example, emphasise the need for critics to get to grips with the technicalities of fiction-making -

> There is still a strong tendency to avoid problems of technique and design and structure in fiction, and to concentrate on what the book talks about rather than on what it actually presents. It is still not generally understood either that "reality" in literature cannot be presented at all except within the conventions of literary structure, and that those conventions must be understood first. (*SS*, p. 43)

- and, in this way, he takes a similar position to Stevenson: 'Art is not like theology; nothing is forced. You have not to represent the world. You have to represent only what you can represent with pleasure and effect, and the only way to find out what that is is by technical exercise'.[30] Similarly, in 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction', Stevenson draws attention to the function of characters as technical components of a story's structure, suggesting that they are derived from an 'invisible' resource of

literary conventions, although his emphasis on the 'visible' aspect of conventions (as purely material elements of *text*) is already discernible:

> These verbal puppets ... are things of a divided parentage: the breath of life may be an emanation from their maker, but they themselves are only strings of words and parts of books; they dwell in, they belong to, literature; convention, technical artifice, technical gusto, the mechanical necessities of the art, these are the flesh and blood with which they are invested.[31]

In 'A Humble Remonstrance', meanwhile, Stevenson goes into far more detail in defining the technicalities of form and the condition of fiction, and, in doing so, issues the same analogies and analytical principles later issued, as we shall see, by Frye. The condition of fiction as a representational medium, in taking its place among the other art forms, can be compared, says Stevenson, to geometry:

> What, then, is the object, what the method, of an art, and what the source of its power? The whole secret is that no art does "compete with life." Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half-shut his eyes against the dazzle and confusion of reality. The arts, like arithmetic and geometry, turn away their eyes from the gross, coloured and mobile nature at our feet, and regard instead a certain figmentary abstraction. Geometry will tell us of a circle, a thing never seen in nature; asked about a green circle or an iron circle, it lays its hand upon its mouth. So with the arts ... A proposition of geometry does not compete with life; and a proposition of geometry is a fair and luminous parallel for a work of art. Both are reasonable, both untrue to the crude fact; both inhere in nature, neither represents it. (HR, pp. 172 - 174)

Frye, advancing similar claims, relates the principle of fiction as an abstraction to the principle of displacement among generic forms. Romance, he asserts, is more distant from reality than realistic modes only inasmuch as it represents a further abstraction from reality than realistic modes. Romance is no less 'true' to nature than realism, nor more vulnerable to 'any child-and-adult value judgement about beliefs'. It

merely reflects, says Frye, 'the fact that undisplaced versions present the narrative structure more abstractly, just as a cubist or primitive painting would represent the geometrical forms of its images more directly than straight representation would do' (*SS*, p. 41). As regards myths, says Frye:

> It follows that the mythical mode, the stories about gods, in which characters have the greatest power of action, is the most abstract and conventionalized of all literary modes, just as the corresponding modes in other arts - religious Byzantine painting, for example - show the highest degree of stylization in their structure. Hence the structural principles of literature are as closely related to mythology and comparative religion as those of painting are to geometry. (*AC*, pp. 134 - 35)

It is noticeable that Frye has extended the analogy between fiction and geometry to include painting. In describing the abstract quality of fiction further, Frye invokes yet another analogy, this time relating to music:

> In this book we are attempting to outline a few of the grammatical rudiments of literary expression, and the elements of it that correspond to such musical elements as tonality, simple and compound rhythm, canonical imitation, and the like... We are suggesting that the resources of verbal expression are limited, if that is the word, by the literary equivalents of rhythm and key.... (*AC*, p. 132)

Overall, Frye contends, '[p]roblems of design, of composition and balance and contrast, are obviously as central in the verbal arts as they are in music or painting' (*SS*, p. 37). Returning to 'A Humble Remonstrance', we find Stevenson conveying an identical series of analogies in describing, like Frye, the estrangement of literature from any external foundation:

> Music is but an arbitrary trifling with a few of life's majestic chords; painting is but a shadow of its pageantry of light and colour; literature does but dryly indicate that wealth of incident, of moral obligation, of virtue, vice, action, rapture and agony, with which it teems. To "compete

> with life," whose sun we cannot look upon, whose passions and diseases waste and slay us - to compete with the flavour of wine, the beauty of the dawn, the scorching of fire, the bitterness of death and separation - here are, indeed, labours for a Hercules in a dress coat, armed with a pen and a dictionary to depict the passions, armed with a tube of superior flake-white to paint the portrait of the insufferable sun. (HR, p. 172)

Developing these analogies further, Stevenson shows a remarkable correspondence to Frye, as well as to formalism and structuralism more generally, in defining the condition of literature as a self-contained and self-referential region of activity:

> Painting, ruefully comparing sunshine and white-flake, gives up truth of colour, as it had already given up relief and movement; and instead of vying with nature, arranges a scheme of harmonious tints. Literature, above all in its most typical mood, the mood of narrative, similarly flees the direct challenge and pursues instead an independent and creative aim. (HR, p. 173)

> Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art, in comparison, is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing and emasculate. Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder; art catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like an air artificially made by a musician. (HR, p. 174)

And again, in 'A Humble Remonstrance', Stevenson significantly pre-empts the arrival of critical approaches that would characterise fiction as a mode of writing which follows its own internal logic. In doing so, he verges, terminologically as well as theoretically, on something like an archetypal theory (Stevenson's word is 'typical' rather than archetypal). We could even say that he anticipates, implicitly, the possibility of an alternative literary universe as we have received it through Frye; albeit, the emphasis on the artificiality of narrative is highly noticeable:

> Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied, not so much in making stories true as making them typical; not so much in capturing the lineaments of each fact, as in marshalling them towards a common end. For the welter of impressions, all forcible but all discreet, which life

> presents, it substitutes a certain artificial series of impressions, all indeed most feebly represented, but all aiming at the same effect, all eloquent of the same idea, all chiming together like consonant notes in music or like the graduated tints in a good picture. (HR, p. 173)

It is impressive enough that Stevenson should recognise the detachment of narrative from any representational foundation, and that he should pre-empt Frye's idea of narrative as an 'autonomous verbal structure' (*AC*, p. 74) or 'a hypothetical verbal structure which exists for its own sake' (*AC*, p. 245). At his most intuitive, though, Stevenson pre-empts the latter-day recognition of the trans-generic operations of narrative as being among the broader operations of a field of textuality. On the one hand, says Glenda Norquay, this expands the 'blurring of categories between the serious and the popular'[32] and the negation of value-judgements as reliable critical criteria. On the other, and in a move which clearly 'anticipates the thinking of later theorists', it evokes an elimination of special categories of writing through an 'applicability of "narrative" as a term to poetry, to drama, to biography and even to history, in which, [Stevenson] suggests, we can find many of the same textual features and literary strategies that are apparent in fiction'.[33] In this sense, Stevenson begins to radically outdistance Frye, who as yet retains a separation between literature and what he calls descriptive or assertive modes of writing, those forms of writing (historical, scientific, philosophical or theological) that presuppose a referential correspondence between the text and a reality- or truth-foundation.[34] For Frye, 'verbal structures may be classified according to whether the *final* direction of meaning is outward or inward'. Thus:

> In descriptive or assertive writing the final direction is outward. Here the verbal structure is intended to represent things external to it, and it is valued in terms of the accuracy with which it does represent them ... In

> all literary verbal structures the final direction of meaning is inward ... In literature, questions of fact are subordinated to the primary aim of producing a structure of words for its own sake, and the sign-values of the symbols are subordinated to their importance as a structure of interconnected motifs. Wherever we have an autonomous verbal structure of this kind, we have literature. Wherever this autonomous structure is lacking, we have language, words used instrumentally to help human consciousness do or understand something else. Literature is a specialised form of language, as language is of communication. (*AC*, p. 74)

As regards history, Frye is far too off-the-cuff, asserting that 'the historian selects his facts, but to suggest that he had manipulated them would be grounds for libel' (*AC*, p. 75). Stevenson, on the other hand, by his expansion of the concept of narrative, denies these separate faculties of linguistic function. 'The art of narrative,' he says in 'A Humble Remonstrance', 'is the same, whether it is applied to the selection and illustration of a real series of events or of an imaginary series' (HR, p. 170). Contrary to Frye, Stevenson puts the onus, precisely, on the historian's necessary conversion of 'facts' into narrative raw materials which, when pieced together, produce, not descriptive accuracy or truth, but an effect akin to fiction. Like authors of fiction, historians are engaged in a process of constructing narratives which, in being dependent on method, become indirect modifications of the realities they claim to represent:

> No art is true in this sense: none can "compete with life": not even history, built indeed of indisputable facts, but these facts robbed of their vivacity and sting; so that when we read of the sack of a city or the fall of an empire, we are surprised, and justly commend the author's talent, if our pulse be quickened. And mark, for a last differentia, that this quickening of the pulse is, in almost every case, purely agreeable; that these phantom reproductions of experience, even at their most acute, convey decided pleasure; while experience itself, in the cockpit of life, can torture and slay. (HR, pp. 172 - 173)

In a similar move, Stevenson goes further than Frye, not only in proclaiming the representational incapacities of descriptive or assertive writing, but of language in its entirety. 'Language', he tells us, 'is but a poor bull's-eye lantern wherewith to show off the vast cathedral of the world'.[35] Or, more sceptically still: '...written words remain fixed, become idols even to the writer, found wooden dogmatisms, and preserve flies of obvious error in the amber of the truth'.[36] The implications of these remarks appear to suggest of language a labyrinth of discourses segregated from any referential basis in truth, being, essence or whatever, whilst emphasising the materiality of language to a point that it consists of signs devoid of the presences they refer to.

As we shall see in more detail in a moment, it is chiefly Stevenson's emphasis on the arbitrary nature and materiality of the text, and on the inability of narrative to effect a metaphysical means of signification, that most clearly separates him from Frye. In Frye's case, literature is anti-representational, but it is nevertheless capable of establishing a truth-foundation in the idea of the Logos. Through the transcendental operations of metaphor, any individual narrative remains for Frye a visible manifestation of the invisible text which, with the Logos at its centre, the author has accessed through the visionary means at his disposal. In exploring Stevenson's concept of structure, however, we find that the invisible text inhabits an untranslatable space which exists, if at all, beyond the scope of the visible medium, while the visible medium itself is not anchored in anything outside of the immediate conditions of its localised production. In considering the intricacies of Stevenson's theoretical programme it becomes clear that, for Stevenson, narrative is ultimately the property of style, of idiolect - not of the author's visionary propensity; while, as

will be revealed in the second chapter of this section, the desire which perpetuates narrative is not, as with Frye, the effect of some overriding cosmic thrust. As a preliterate cause of the effect of fiction, desire is grounded firmly in the genealogical impetus of 'certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man'. There are some intriguing propositions arising from this which drive a decisive wedge between Stevenson and Frye, not least through Stevenson's discovery of a dislocation between the concrete materials of narrative and the impulse of desire which initiates the formation of narrative. And it is here that Stevenson begins to address the issue concerning the translation of the text from its 'invisible' to 'visible' status. Looking at this now, it is necessary to begin with Stevenson's more general assertations concerning the production of narrative, before focusing, in the following chapter, on the special function he assigns to romance in view of the limitations stated here.

The Visible Text

I will argue in this sub-section, among other things, that, for Stevenson, the structurality of narrative is only possible through the more immediate dynamics of language and through the author's handling of the local difficulties of language, a feature of structural production that Frye fails to address. Frye denies any creative autonomy on the grounds that a grammar of archetypes pre-exists authorial agency. If narrative ultimately resides in and refers to an archetypal plenum, then the role of the author is at once diminished; authorial 'presence' is the property of the archetype and issues, ultimately, from the linguistic avatar of the Logos. For Derrida, on the

other hand, authorial 'presence' or 'consciousness' is irretrievably disseminated through the signifying chain, so that agency, in the end, is an illusory component of speech revealed in writing, the true condition of language.

With Stevenson, however, the emphasis is placed squarely on the role of the author as the arbiter of narrative structure, and he is quick to deride, for example, the author-as-realist who, in his attempts 'to immolate his readers under facts', embarks on false accessions to objectivity which lead him, Stevenson protests, 'to discard all design, to abjure all choice'. Choice, autonomy, creative function, are held by Stevenson as pivotal forces in literary production, to the point that 'in every case the artist must decide for himself, and decide afresh and yet afresh for each succeeding work and new creation' (NR, p. 74). The process of narrative, then, is a decision-making process and, in this sense, the author manufactures form rather than gains access to form through an apocalyptic medium.

But Stevenson's insistence on the author by no means reflects some kind of post-Romantic cult of subjectivity. To state in advance what will be shown in this sub-section, Stevenson often diminishes the stature of the author and perversely celebrates the impossibilities of writing. Over the course of his work, he assembles a theory of composition which involves a repudiation of traditional notions of creativity and a reversal of assumptions concerning the organicity of literary form. For Stevenson, the author, in spite of his ability to administer choice over his materials, is incapacitated by the restrictions of intellectual method and by the local difficulties of the linguistic system which, Stevenson suggests, has no natural or instantaneous contact with the author's initial power to conceive. In his attempt to administer form through language, the author is 'naturally' disadvantaged: the

narrative he produces is dependent on his personal struggle with an available range of artificial materials which continually elude his creative scope. It is part of the author's task that he applies the strictest measure of self-conscious endeavour in arranging these materials effectively, but this, as we shall see, is always an insurmountable difficulty which, if it is to have any effect at all, requires the demotion of the author from the position of artist to 'artisan'.

Some of Stevenson's most enigmatic references to the nature of textuality are made in the essay 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature'. His enthusiasm for the necessity of conventions, seen earlier, is now underpinned by an insistence on the position of the author as being constrained to work with a linguistic apparatus which acts, not as an aid to composition, but as an obligatory hindrance, a handicap, a 'singular limitation':

> ...literature alone is condemned to work in mosaic with finite and quite rigid words. You have seen these blocks dear to the nursery: this one a pillar, that a pediment, a third a window or a vase. It is with blocks of just such arbitrary size and figure that the literary architect is condemned to design the palace of his art. Nor is this all ... but every word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph must move in a logical progression, and convey a definite conventional import.[37]

His choice of terminology - his analogies between text and architecture or material construction - convey a healthy engagement with the structural principles of fiction. But the tone is less frivolous than before as regards the operations of language and form. In this instance, the author is 'condemned' to struggle with the unavoidable requirements of his linguistic resources. He is required to work with arbitrary materials and, from within a limited textual economy, to produce a sense of order which does not inhere in the materials themselves. It is the author's task to fashion a

conventional order out of a chaos that precedes his intervention, in a process that denies the possibility of structure as the offspring of some absolute model. Structure, rather, is the cumulative effect of the stylistic management of unmanageable materials.

It is at moments like these that Stevenson appears poised on a verge - mindful of the formalist / structuralist plateau he has thoughtfully erected, yet sensible too of the void which surrounds and undermines it. The emphasis on language as an inorganic material betrays a feeling that there is no pre-existing network of values from which the emergent narrative receives its formal impetus. Instead, Stevenson is given to characterise narrative as a form without substance outside of itself, which, while it gives the appearance of being rooted in some pre-established order of significations, is structurally and semantically vacuous:

> There is nothing more disenchanting to man than to be shown the springs and mechanism of any art. All our arts and occupations lie wholly on the surface; it is on the surface that we perceive their beauty, fitness, and significance; and to pry below is to be appalled by their emptiness and shocked by the coarseness of the strings and pulleys. In a similar way, psychology itself, when pushed to any nicety, discovers an abhorrent baldness, but rather from the fault of our analysis than from any poverty native to the mind. And perhaps in aesthetics the reason is the same: those disclosures which seem fatal to the dignity of art seem so perhaps only in the proportion of our ignorance; and those conscious and unconscious artifices which it seems unworthy of the serious artist to employ were yet, if we had the power to trace them to their springs, indications of a delicacy of the sense finer than we can conceive, and hints of ancient harmonies in nature. This ignorance at least is largely irremediable. We shall never learn the affinities of beauty, for they lie too deep in nature and too far back in the mysterious history of man.[38]

Stevenson, like Frye, is seeking to penetrate the 'visible' exterior of fiction and reach its 'invisible' interior so as to reveal its originary foundations, its causal operations and preliterate incentives. Given that the archetypal schema is based, precisely, on

the theorem that the structural tendencies of narrative, those 'conscious and unconscious artifices', can be directly related to 'ancient harmonies in nature', Stevenson, again, is running very close to Frye. But there are several areas where Stevenson resists the implications of an archetypal reading. In the first place, he indicates a deficiency in our modes of analysis - as well as in 'psychology itself' - which prevents our gaining an exhaustive understanding of the processes of literary production. We are not equipped, intellectually or epistemologically, to resolve the mysteries of composition; and, while Stevenson expresses the possibility of a pre-textual site of origins, unlike Frye, he will not admit its actualisation (in the form of the Logos) through textual means. He seems to sense a metaphysical foundation, and yet, in attempting to reveal it, sees only the inorganic hardware, tricks of the trade and inanimate matter of composition. In this sense, he indicates a rupture between the (invisible) origin and (visible) articulation of written texts, between 'a delicacy of sense finer than we can conceive' and 'the coarseness of the strings and pulleys' that constitute the completed article. As a visible conception, the text is unstable, a structure without a central emanation - in effect, a structure devoid of any inherent structurality. It is detached from any external 'presences' that may have enabled its genesis and formation, organically, through the material realms of the text and, moreover, lacks any transcendental impetus that may have precluded the local difficulties of writing or improved the author's disadvantaged status.

More striking, perhaps, are Stevenson's references to the absence (the 'emptiness', the 'abhorrent baldness') of any solid basis of meaning in 'our arts and occupations' and in 'psychology itself'. Such a consideration, related to fiction, not only emphasises the artificiality, as opposed to organicity, of narrative: it threatens

the semantic validity of narrative and excludes the idea of structure as a series of conventional associations which converge upon the author in the event of writing. Structure, for Stevenson, is synthetic. Significance, meanwhile, is purely an effect of the text, and narrative a set of semantic transactions which have no conceptual foundation or target beyond the limitations of their own (synthetic) effect. The significance of a work of art, Stevenson implies, occurs on the 'surface', artificially; it is a product only of the material assets of the text which have no intrinsic value or significance in themselves. 'Here are stories which powerfully affect the reader,' Stevenson remarks of the *Arabian Nights* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, 'which can be reperused at any age, and where the characters are no more than puppets. The bony fist of the showman visibly propels them; their springs are an open secret; their faces are of wood, their bellies filled with bran; and yet we thrillingly partake of their adventures' (GR, pp. 160 - 161). Or again, says Stevenson, with an explicit emphasis on the materiality of narrative:

> Dumas approaches perhaps nearest of any modern to these Arabian authors in the purely material charm of a some his romances. The early part of *Monte Cristo*, down to the finding of the treasure, is a piece of perfect story-telling; the man never breathed who shared these moving incidents without a tremor; and yet Faria is a thing of packthread and Dantès little more than a name. (GR, p. 160)

Contrary to Frye, then, Stevenson invalidates conventions as items endowed with this or that semantic value, defining them, instead, as signs without the efficacy of the presences they refer to. The semantic value of narrative is seen as a factitious effect, and the failure to recognise the effect, as it were, as an unintentional fallacy. To expose this fallacy, says Stevenson, is 'a most distasteful business: taking down the picture from the wall and looking on the back; and like the inquiring child, pulling

the musical cart to pieces'.[39] To be pulling the musical cart to pieces is an activity which can be said to permeate Stevenson's essays and fictions alike, and this in view of his expressed reliance on conventions. The suggestion presents itself, more clearly than ever, that Stevenson uses conventions if only to disrupt the sanctity of narrative forms, reaffirming their effectiveness whilst showing them to be incapable of sustaining a metaphorical bond between one text and another.

To recap, then, Stevenson, in revealing an 'emptiness' or lack of foundation, no longer posits narrative as a natural sequence of intelligible items. Intelligibility depends on the artificial manipulation of the linguistic stockpile. Conventions, as collective clusters of words that situate structure, become uprooted from any solid basis of meaning. As narrative elements, they have no basis in any universal model: they are random and only cease to be random under the local supervisions of the disadvantaged author. It is a measure of his commitment as a theorist that Stevenson explores these matters further in other essays, this time relating the principles given above to narrative structure in the broadest possible sense:

> A work of art is first cloudily conceived in the mind; during the period of gestation it stands more clearly forward from these swaddling mists, puts on expressive lineaments, and becomes at length that most faultless, but also, alas! that incommunicable product of the human mind, a perfected design. On the approach to execution all is changed. The artist must now step down, don his working clothes, and become the artisan. He now resolutely commits his airy conception, his delicate Ariel, to the touch of matter; he must decide, almost in a breath, the scale, the style, the spirit, and the particularity of execution of his whole design. (NR, p. 71).

While Frye's analysis of structure led him to conceive of literature as a structural and semantic totality, Stevenson recognises the individual role of the author and proposes a version of structure which is only possible through stylistic management or, as

Calvino has implied, through the idiolectic conversion of ideas into textual materials. Narrative, for Frye, is a metaphysical organicity, an unbreakable bond of archetypal functions that enter into consciousness and inform the imaginative impulses of authorial agency. For Frye, narrative is a perfected design prior to and after its authorial assimilation and disclosure. A perfected design in Stevenson's view, however, is impossible because the design must undergo the transitional rupture of its stylistic delivery, style being the intermediate stage between the mystery of personality, wherein the idea of a work of art is 'cloudily conceived', and its verbal actualisation. In definite contrast to Frye, then, Stevenson posits a disjunction between the initial conception of an 'invisible' design-formation and its articulation through a 'visible' medium. Stevenson situates the origins of creativity within the subjective space of authorial agency where it becomes subject to the local expediencies of language. As such, the idea of the story will not appear in itself, but only as an effort at one, bearing in mind that to make 'the idea' manageable through words is impossible because language consists of unmanageable materials. The author must confront the impossibilities of writing and commit his ideas to texts which will not reveal them in their visible aspect. Hence, the idiolectic conversion of ideas into textual materials necessitates a dislocation between the idea and its material thought, between the originary design-formation and 'the particularity' of the design as a finished product.

The implications of this, in contradistinction to Frye, are broad and need to be summarised accordingly. The creative origins of literary form and function, as we have seen, have been consigned by Stevenson to an untraceable space of 'ancient harmonies in nature' or unaccountable regions in 'the mysterious history of man', unavailable to the intellect because of the inherent limitations of intellectual method. Emerging from the 'swaddling mists', these untraceable factors remain outside the field of linguistic determination - which is why they are untraceable - so that the text emerges from an author who is detached from any intelligible contact with an originary presence. Structure is achieved, not as a result of Frye's 'shaping spirit' (*SS*, p. 35), or of any other contact with the / a transcendental signified, but through the active participation of the artist as artisan, rather than visionary. In this respect, narrative emerges, not from the central emanation of the Logos, but from the disadvantaged author who, in the act of writing, invokes a detachment between the originary conception and the item conceived. For Stevenson, no such transcendental signifieds exist or, at least, are not permitted to exist as identifiable concepts within the context of narrative. They are 'cloudily conceived' within 'an inaccessible silence',[40] conceived as ideas, whereas the finished product can only be an effort towards an idea rather than an idea in itself. That which is presented, that which we receive, is the materialisation of the *thought of a thought*, 'the possible attempt at an impossible conception'. In this sense, the 'purely material charm' of narrative is absolute: narrative is structurally unfixed and semantically devalued by the absence of the vital element, the unadulterated 'essence' of the original design-formation, 'the

airy conception' of the idea in itself, the element of narrative which narrative requires but which it always already lacks.

The implications of this can, of course, be related to post-structuralist accounts of linguistic procedure. In defining certain aspects of deconstruction, for example, Christopher Norris informs us that 'Derrida's logic is simple but devastating. Language can fulfil the condition of self-present meaning only if it offers a *total and immediate* access to the thoughts that occasioned its utterance. But this is an impossible requirement'.[41] Stevenson's logic would appear to be as equally devastating. To paraphrase Norris in relation to Stevenson, narrative can fulfil the condition of self-present meaning only if it offers a total and immediate access to the thought that occasioned its utterance. But this, Stevenson tells us, is an impossible requirement. In the end, narrative remains the *thought of a thought* that occasioned its utterance, a structure without self-present meaning, a structure detached from any organising principle other than, in Stevenson's terms, an immediate 'particularity of execution'.

Overall, then, according to Stevenson's view, the author's attempt to produce a perfected design depends on his handling of the linguistic and literary machinery before him. Literary structure has no independent function that overrides the author's interaction or transcends him altogether. There is no visionary accession to some incorruptible organicity of 'total form' (*AC*, p. 121). In the event of its idiolectic transformation, structure can only exist, from author to author and work to work, as a series of finely-wrought imperfections. No formula exists which the author meets with repeated exactness. No story exists as 'an individual manifestation of the total order of words' (*AC*, p. 121). Under Stevenson's terms, narrative becomes an

idiolectic supplement of language, a linguistic formation comparable only to itself - in short, a structure which has established its 'own independent and creative aim' and which has separated itself from any prospect of totality. By the same token, the conventions pertaining to literary structure are not a manifestation of archetypes, but a series of veritable absences - inaccurate translations of conceptions, or ideas, that cannot be met or replicated in words. The linguistic determination of the idea of a design results in its being deferred through material stages so that a story, in effect, becomes a detached metaphor for an idea which it cannot represent. The archetype, similarly, ceases to exist because it cannot be attached to any associative relation outside of the structure it belongs to. As a narrative component, the archetype becomes a product of the idiolect; and the idiolect, in this case, is the material aspect of the unimaginable.

It is typical of Stevenson that, while his theories impart a decisive limitation on the form and function of narrative in general, he is able to exploit this limitation in relation, specifically, to the form and function of romance. And this is a matter which will be dealt with in the second chapter of this section, with a particular emphasis on that which has so far been ignored - namely, the author's power to conceive in the first place. The author's failure to translate his ideas into an identical textuality notwithstanding, Stevenson advocates the author's initial power to conceive, even while the initial conception of a work of art is placed at an inaccessible distance from the linguistic means at its disposal. Nevertheless, Stevenson explores the mysteries of creative origin which he ascribes, like Frye, though with significant differences, to desire. In suggesting a dislocation between the originary conception of a story and the story conceived, then, Stevenson is suggesting a dislocation between the concrete

materials of narrative and the impulse of desire which initiates the formation of narrative. Under very different conditions from those described by Frye, Stevenson assigns a special function to romance - namely, of accommodating the creative impetus of desire which occasioned its formation but which, under the material conditions of language, it cannot accommodate within the 'visible' context of narrative. It is mainly through his discovery of this aporia, as well as through his attempts to resolve it, that Stevenson is able to produce a romance of the modern idiom.

Notes

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[1] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 2.
[2] Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism* (Hampshire and London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1996), p. 3.
[3] See Sandison's compelling case for Stevenson as a proto-Modernist in *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*. Sandison forms his argument around Stevenson's 'intense artistic self-consciousness' which he identifies as a prime example of Malcolm Bradbury's and James MacFarlane's suggested Modernist trait of 'a fascination with evolving consciousness: consciousness aesthetic, psychological and historical'. Bradbury and MacFarlane (eds.), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890 - 1930* (London: Penguin Books LTD, 1991), p. 4.
[4] See Bradbury and MacFarlane (eds.), *Modernism*, p. 31.
[5] George Moore, in Maixner (ed.), *The Critical Heritage*, pp. 476 - 477.
[6] Robert Kiely, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Adventure Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 20.
[7] Fowler, 'Parables of Adventure', p. 106.
[8] See, for example, Norquay's introduction to *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction* (pp. 1 - 25) in which she draws some significant parallels between Stevenson and Barthes.
[9] Susan Sontag (ed.), *A Roland Barthes Reader* (London: Vintage, 1993), p. vii.
[10] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 1.
[11] David Thorburn, *Conrad's Romanticism* (London: Yale Univ. Press, 1974), p. 42.
[12] Thorburn, *Conrad's Romanticism*, p. 5.
[13] For more on Conrad and Modernism see Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); and C. B. Cox, *Joseph Conrad: The Modern Imagination* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1974). For Conrad's relation to Moderism more generally, see Bradbury and MacFarlane (eds.), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890 - 1930.*
[14] Ian Campbell, *Nineteenth Century Scottish Fiction*, p. 105.
[15] It should be pointed out that Conrad's works are usually divided into two major groups - the south sea stories (*Typhoon*, *Lord Jim*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, *Victory*, etc.) and the political stories (*Under Western Eyes*, *The Secret Agent* and *Nostromo*). A third group, it could be argued, presents itself through the African stories, of which there are only two (*Heart of Darkness* and 'An Outpost of Progress'). There are also some anomalies, like the historical short story 'The Duellists', set during the Napoleonic wars. In spite of the adjustments of setting and social context, however, it is still the case

that Conrad's writing adheres consistently to a select variety of themes. The only exceptions are the romances that Conrad wrote later in his career, which I refer to in due course. Generally, these romances (like *The Rover* or *Romance*) are regarded as embarrassing failures and, for the most part, are conveniently ignored by Conradian critics.

[16] Penny Fielding, *Writing and Orality: Nationality, Culture, and Nineteenth-Century Scottish Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 171.

[17] Quote taken from Brown (ed.), *A Book of Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 30.

[18] As an anecdote, it is worth recalling Sidney Colvin's inference, in his *Memoirs and Notes of Persons and Places*, regarding Stevenson and Conrad: 'Of those who had not begun to publish before he [R. L. S.] had died, the man I imagine him calling for first of all is the above-mentioned Mr. Conrad... How they would delight in meeting now! What endless ocean and island yarns the two would exchange; how happily they would debate the methods and achievements of their common art...!' Taken from Nicholas Rankin, *Dead Man's Chest: Travels After Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), p. 142.

[19] Thorburn, *Conrad's Romanticism*, p. 33.

[20] Further examples given by Thorburn include the following: In writing to Ford Madox Ford, Conrad exclaims: 'Any prose read directly after yours produce[s] the effect of thick mouthing. That anybody could mention, in connection with you, that Virtuoso Cymbalist Stevenson passes my comprehension'. In a letter to Alfred Knopf, he is even more to the point: 'When it comes to popularity I stand much nearer the public mind than Stevenson, who was super-literary, a conscious virtuoso of style; whereas the average mind does not care much for virtuosity'. See David Thorburn, *Conrad's Romanticism*, p. 176.

[21] Bradbury and MacFarlane (eds.), *Modernism*, p. 73.

[22] Andrew Lang, unsigned review, *Daily News*, 5 October 1889, in Paul Maixner (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 346.

[23] See Bradbury and MacFarlane's introductory chapter to *Modernism*, 'The Name and Nature of Modernism', pp. 19-55. The quote given in my text is from p. 21.

[24] Sandison, *Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, p. 8.

[25] This 'playfulness', as well as the confessional aspect of his essays on fiction, has been astutely summarised by Norquay in her introduction to *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*: 'For the modern reader ... part of the attraction of these essays must lie in their lack of gravitas, in the emphasis on the personal, and in that element of play which disturbed Stevenson's contemporaries' (p. 3).

[26] Victor Shklovsky, in Ingo Seidler, 'The Inconolatric Fallacy: On the Limitations of the Internal Method of Criticism', *JAAC*, 26 (1967): 13, in William Bonney, *Thorns and Arabesques: Contexts for Conrad's Fiction* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 10.

[27] James, 'Robert Louis Stevenson', *Henry James, The Critical Muse*, p. 261.

[28] Italo Calvino in the introduction to *Our Ancestors* (London: Minerva, 1992), pp. vii-viii.

[29] Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 203.

[30] Robert Louis Stevenson, *Letters to His Family and Friends, vol. II*, ed. Sydney Colvin (London: Methuen and Co., 1899), p. 252.

[31] Stevenson, 'Some Gentlemen in Fiction', *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 158.

[32] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 9.

[33] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 8.

[34] Stevenson, that is to say, begins to question our assumptions about epistemological categories in a way, for instance, that Foucault does to greater effect, almost a century later, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> We must also question those divisions and groupings with which we have become so familiar. Can one accept, as such, the distinction between such forms or genres as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history, fiction, etc., and which we tend to create great historical individualities?... The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network... Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the *oeuvre* of an author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing is, in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general. Michael

Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in Rivkin and Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory*, pp. 422 - 423.

[35] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Walt Whitman', *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (London: Tusitala Edition, 1924), p. 59.

[36] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Talk and Talkers', *Memories and Portraits*, p. 91.

[37] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', *Essays Literary and Critical*, p. 34.

[38] Stevenson, 'Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', pp. 33 - 34.

[39] Stevenson, 'Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature', pp. 33 - 34.

[40] Berman, *From the New Criticism to Deconstuction*, p. 202.

[41] Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction: Theory and Practice* (London and New York: Methuen & Co. LTD, 1982), p. 46.

Chapter Four

The Genealogy of Romance II

The 'Probably Arboreal'

Following on from the last chapter, there is some ambiguity in Stevenson's arguments about the distinction between the event of execution and the originary source of the design-formation which he attributes, sceptically and vaguely, to an unthinkable space - to 'swaddling mists', 'ancient harmonies in nature', 'the mysterious history of man', and so on. In other essays, Stevenson offers more definite resolutions as to the nature of creative origin and impulse which, again, resemble Frye's ideas while at the same time as departing from them. In the following passage, Stevenson evokes a more rigid discrimination between the operations of style (of execution or idiolect) and the preliterate stages of conception which precede it:

> Style is the invariable mark of any master; and for the student who does not aspire so high as to be numbered with the giants, it is still the one quality in which he may improve himself at will. Passion, wisdom, creative force, the power of mystery or colour, are allotted in the hour of birth, and can be neither learned nor simulated. (NR, p. 69)

Style, the author's struggle with language, is, as far as Stevenson is concerned, the only means by which he can actively or consciously pursue the production of the visible text, so that, at this level, there is no creative mystery occurring. Because of

its engagement with artificial materials, style can be improved, just as the deftness of a sculptor's touch can be improved through repeated exercise and practice. Those more mystifying aspects of creativity, which Stevenson has previously associated with the vagaries of swaddling mists and ancient harmonies, are more positively identified as being received, not through any visionary contact with the ultimate source (as it is with Frye), but through the author's biological or genealogical inheritance. As the author maintains a fragile command over the course of his work by inadequate acts of choice, he is impelled, says Stevenson, by creative forces that are genetically 'allotted at the hour of birth'. This presents an intriguing contrast to, as well as denial of, the archetypal schema. The event of writing is genetic rather than generic, Stevenson suggests, full of idiosyncrasies, quirks and deviations, rather than the sustained application of a universal structure. Similarly, Stevenson eradicates the metaphysical extensions of Frye's anatomy, replacing it with a radical pragmatism which involves, by varying degrees, a colourful adaptation of Darwinian principles, which Stevenson applies (as we shall see shortly) to matters of composition and which he uses, most emphatically, as a means of theorising romance.

Elsewhere, however, Stevenson, to some extent resembling Frye, introduces a psycho-dynamic element to the mysteries of conception and creative force, as summarised here, by Penny Fielding, who points out that romances, 'in Stevenson's opinion, are the expression of their readers' natural desires'.[1] In relating the issue, Stevenson is prone to sounding, on one level, like the staunch advocate of wish-fulfilment literature he often is: '...the great creative writer shows us the realisation and the apotheosis of the day-dreams of common men. His stories may be nourished

with the realities of life, but their true mark is to satisfy the nameless longings of the reader, and to obey the ideal laws of the day-dream'(GR, p. 156). But it is by releasing his own, as it were, 'desire'-formations that the author is able to conceive the design-formations which will become, in time, the material realisations of the visible text: '...it will be found true, I believe, in a majority of cases, that the artist writes with more gusto and effect of those things which he has wished to do, than of those which he has done. Desire is a wonderful telescope, and Pisgah the best observatory' (HR, pp. 175 - 176).

In terms of its being a generative impulse in the emergence of narrative, desire is not confined to the elaborate self-indulgences of wish-fulfilment dream. The biological origins of creative force and the inducement of desire as creative energy are consolidated by Stevenson in his Darwinian prodigy, the 'Probably Arboreal'. In the figure of the Probably Arboreal, which appears (by name) in two of his essays, Stevenson traces the creative impulse beyond the author's 'hour of birth', evoking from the depths of his genealogical bloodline an existential dynamism which can eventually be traced to the pre-historic apeman. The Probably Arboreal is initially introduced by Stevenson in his essay 'The Manse', in which he attempts to summarise himself and his 'minister-grandfather' in relation to their entire ancestral heritage. What begins as an autobiographical reminiscence on the character of his near relative becomes a mini-treatise on the character and locality of the human individual as a product of successive aeons of genetic interaction. (There are interesting possibilities here, which will be re-invoked later, in that 'the subject' is designated, by Stevenson, not as unique but, so to speak, as the product of a signifying chain of ancestors: the subject, in other words, is not a liberated agency,

but the conglomerate effect of countless othernesses). Identified in 'The Manse' as the originary source of Stevenson's genetic inheritance, the Probably Arboreal is latterly evoked, in the essay 'Pastoral', as the originary source of the passage of desire through narrative structure. Already in 'The Manse', however, we recognise Stevenson's tendency to saturate the biographical or factual data he provides with a discursive gloss which is more in keeping with his theories of romance than anything else. A telling reference to Bailie Nicol Jarvie, from Scott's *Rob Roy*, would seem to emphasise the point, as fact and fiction become audaciously intermixed. The quotation here is long but should be repeated in full for what it reveals of Stevenson's adaptation of nineteenth-century theories of 'heredity':

> But our ancestral adventures are beyond even the arithmetic of fancy; and it is the chief recommendation of long pedigrees, that we can follow backward the careers of our *homunculus* and be reminded of our antenatal lives. Our conscious years are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us. Are you a bank-clerk, and do you live at Peckam? It was not always so. And though to-day I am only a man of letters, either tradition errs or I was present when there landed at St. Andrews a French barber-surgeon, to tend the health and the beard of the great Cardinal Beaton; I have shaken a spear in the Debatable Land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots; I was present when a skipper, plying from Dundee, smuggled Jacobites to France after the '15; I was in a West India merchant's office, perhaps next door to Bailie Nicol Jarvie's; and managed the business of a plantation in St. Kitts; I was with my engineer-grandfather (the son-in-law of the lamp and oil man) when he sailed north about Scotland on the famous cruise that gave us the *Pirate* and the *Lord of the Isles*; I was with him, too, on the Bell Rock, in the fog, when the *Smeaton* had drifted from her moorings, and the Aberdeen men, pick in hand, had seized upon the only boats, and he must stoop and lap sea-water before his tongue could utter audible words; and once more with him when the Bell Rock beacon took a "thrawe," and his workmen fled into the tower, then nearly finished, and he sat unmoved reading in his Bible - or affecting to read - till one after another slunk back with confusion of countenance to their engineer. Yes, parts of me have seen life, and met adventures, and sometimes met them well. And away in the still cloudier past, the threads that make me up can be traced by fancy into the bosoms of thousands and millions of ascendants: Picts who rallied round MacBeth and the old (and highly preferable) system of

> descent by females, fleers from before the legions of Agricola, marchers in Pannonian morasses, star-gazers on Chaldaean plateaus; and, furthest of all, what face is this that fancy can see peering through the disparted branches? What sleeper in green tree-tops, what muncher of nuts, concludes my pedigree? Probably arboreal in his habits....
>
> And I know not which is the more strange, that I should carry about with me some fibres of my minister grandfather; or that in him, as he sat in his cool study, grave, reverend, contented gentleman, there was an aboriginal frisking of the blood that was not his; tree-top memories, like undeveloped negatives, lay dormant in his mind; tree-top instincts awoke and were trod down; and Probably Arboreal (scarce to be distinguished from a monkey) gambolled and chattered in the brain of the old divine.[2]

Here, Stevenson is referring, for the most part, to a 'science' of genealogy, in and around which he develops a personal 'mythos', which, whether or not it has any basis in biographical fact, is theoretically compact and, certainly, coincident with nineteenth-century perceptions of heredity.[3] In his essay 'Pastoral', meanwhile, Stevenson deploys the same principles in creating a 'science' of genealogy which theorises the transliteration of desire and creative force through narrative means and locates them, finally, as the emergent properties of the 'aboriginal within us'.[4] According to Stevenson, narrative is perpetuated by a desire to release or re-enter the primitive emotional states which occasioned its utterance and which, through the bonds of ancestry, can be intuitively traced to (and from) the originary forefather of the Probably Arboreal. It is through romance especially, says Stevenson, that a hereditary contact with primitive states is made possible,[5] just as it is with Frye that romance affords a visionary accession to the 'original awareness' of Man prior to the fall. Again, the quotation is long but, for the same reasons as before, ought to be given in full. Writing of his acquaintance with a Lowland shepherd, John Todd, Stevenson ruminates:

> A trade that touches nature, one that lies at the foundations of life, in which we have all had ancestors employed, so that on a hint of it ancestral memories revive, lends itself to literary use, vocal or written. The fortune of a tale lies not alone in the skill of him that writes, but as much, perhaps, in the inherited experience of him who reads; and when I hear with a particular thrill of things that I have never done or seen, it is one of that innumerable army of my ancestors rejoicing in past deeds. Thus novels begin to touch not the fine *dilettanti* but the gross of mankind, when they leave off to speak of parlours and shades of manner and still-born niceties of motive, and begin to deal with fighting, sailoring, adventure, death or childbirth; and thus ancient outdoor crafts or occupations, whether Mr. Hardy wields his shepherd's crook or Count Tolstoi swings the scythe, lift romance into near neighbourhood with epic. These aged things have on them the dew of man's morning; they lie near, not so much to us, the semi-artificial flowerets, as to the trunk and aboriginal taproot of the race. A thousand interests spring up in the process of the ages, and a thousand perish; that is now an eccentricity or a lost art which was once the fashion of an empire; and those only are perennial matters that rouse us to-day, and that roused men in all epochs of the past. There is a certain critic, not indeed of execution but of matter, whom I dare to be known to be set before the best: a certain low-browed, hairy gentleman, at first a percher in the fork of trees, next (as they relate) a dweller in caves, and whom I think I see squatting in cave-mouths, of a pleasant afternoon, to munch his berries - his wife, that accomplished lady, squatting by his side: his name I have never heard, but he is often described as Probably Arboreal, which may serve for recognition. Each has his own tree of ancestors, but at the top of all our veins there run some minims of his old, wild, tree-top blood; our civilised nerves still tingle with his rude terrors and pleasures; and to that which would have moved our common ancestor, all must obediently thrill.[6]

For Stevenson, a certain species of experience presents itself as the target object of desire, which we can associate, broadly, with the serial ingredients of romance ('fighting, sailoring, adventure', and, interestingly, 'death and childbirth'). It is these 'things I have never done or seen' that, once again, appear to motivate Stevenson in arranging the 'fortune' of his fictions. At the same time, these things undone or unseen are the historical elements of an emotional pedigree of 'rude terrors and pleasures' which the author and his readers contain in the form of 'ancestral memories' and 'inherited experience[s]'. As such, the author receives a creative

impetus as a consequence of his own containment of inherited experiences which remain inside of him as a kind of genetic residue: to revive them is to experience them anew and, so, relocate 'the aboriginal taproot of the race' from which they initially sprung. Overall, Stevenson suggests, the form of romance is impelled by the genealogical input of the previous generations and is largely conceived as a projection of their existential dynamism through the author-sibling, Stevenson himself, who, in his desire to experience *their* experiences, is compelled to recreate them through the appropriate narrative solutions. Taking it to its furthest point, as Stevenson does, romance is conceived as a genetically preserved desire to release or re-establish contact with a primordial zeal which, as originary source, inhabits both him and his readers and which makes itself available through a genealogical reservoir of Arboreal vitality.[7]

Stevenson presents us, then, with a genealogy of romance, rather than a cosmology of romance, which provides the author with design-formations through the genealogical inheritance of experiences that the author wishes to access narratorially. It is the author's task, overall, to manufacture a design which is capable of expressing these 'ancestral memories' and of enabling, through them, the recovery and release of the Arboreal state of mind. The question presents itself, of course, as to whether this is *stylistically* possible; as to whether the author can articulate the 'natural' inclinations of the Probably Arboreal (which he and his readers contain) through the 'material' limitations and local difficulties of writing described by Stevenson in other essays. It is chiefly this issue that will be addressed in the following sub-sections, though there are some interesting contrasts between Stevenson's account of romance and Frye's which need to be investigated further.

After looking at these, we will examine that which becomes the crux of the matter for Stevenson - namely, the means by which, within the context of fiction, he transforms the structural conventions of romance in an attempt to admit the Arboreal impulse, whereby he necessarily abrogates their archetypal value and disassociates them from the ideological bases upon which they are formed.

Arboreality versus Structurality

In the previous chapter, Stevenson emphasised the author's inability to accurately transcribe any desire- or design-formation when it undergoes its conversion from 'invisible' to 'visible' status. To this extent, Stevenson has inserted a point of separation between those inherited experiences pertaining to the Arboreal impulse and the materiality of the text that aims to admit or recreate it, so that narrative, in the end, is perpetuated by a desire for something which, because of its material condition, it cannot accommodate. This holds true when we consider the fact, implied by Stevenson, that the characteristic condition of the Probably Arboreal is incompatible with the condition of narrative. Stevenson, we recall, concedes that narrative must be made intelligible, that it must follow 'a logical progression' and 'convey a definite conventional import'. Narrative, he says, 'is neat, finite, self-contained, rational': it must acquire a sense of structurality which, we have seen, is entirely artificial. Intelligibility, which is a requirement and a consequence of structure, is likewise artificial, an effect without any foundational object or substantive cause outside of itself. If we compare this to Stevenson's descriptions of

the Probably Arboreal, there are some decisive contrasts. The Probably Arboreal is a primitive agency, consisting of 'wild, tree-top blood' and 'tree-top instincts', inclining towards 'rude terrors and pleasures' that continue to inhabit (or always already inhere in) the 'civilised' condition of men, the condition, according to Frye, that men aspire to through the practice of art. The Probably Arboreal is the origin and object of romance which - Stevenson has said, referring again to a biological fundament - responds 'to certain almost sensual and quite illogical tendencies in man'. The impulse which perpetuates romance, then, does not accord to any formal or intelligible designations: it is illogical, irrational, natural in the sense that it is characterised by the disorder of the Arboreal world which it belongs to. The desire- or design-formation is itself impelled by a primitive agency which finds its release through logical linguistic stratagems that cannot contain or convert its 'illogical tendencies'. In the case of romance, given that it is perpetuated by an illogical impulse, narrative is bound by logical requirements which necessarily, and paradoxically, make the illogical appear logical, the unintelligible appear intelligible, the irrational appear rational, the sensual appear synthetic. As a consequence, the Arboreal vitality that informs romance, when it reaches its communicable stage, becomes something it is not, which means that romance itself (as an effort towards an Arboreal vitality) becomes something it is not. Looking at this another way, Stevenson shows that narrative structure is always already endowed with its opposite quality, a lack of structurality, in that it is informed by a desire to return to the Arboreal condition which occasioned its utterance - a condition, as it were, of pre-structurality which cannot be represented through the structurality of language. Romance, in this sense, consisting of a myriad of imperfect designs, presents a series

of differential efforts towards an idea of Arboreal vitality that cannot be accessed through the linguistic means at its disposal.

The complexities of this go further and can be summarised as follows. Stevenson's advocacy of authorial autonomy or self-consciousness, we notice, occurs at a purely linguistic level where the author can exert his inadequate command over his linguistic resources. At the level of conception, however, autonomy is denied or, rather, disseminated among a 'signifying chain' of ancestors. With Stevenson, any work of romance is not a manifestation of the total order of words, but the local precipitation of a diffused Arboreal urgency which the author has received from an 'innumerable army' of ancestral othernesses. In this sense, the author creates by genetically receiving the creative impetus so that, in writing romances, he is responding to an Arboreal impulse within himself but which, because he has received it differentially, is not his own. In seeking access to the Arboreal level through romance, then, Stevenson is seeking a kind of internal absence of himself through a return to an Arboreal preconsciousness. The deficiency in our intellectual method that Stevenson mentioned earlier - the 'abhorrent baldness' in our psychology, 'the fault of our analysis rather than any poverty native to the mind', the fact that we are bereft of 'the power to trace [the] springs' of 'a delicacy of sense finer than we can conceive' - all of this can now be seen as referring to an over-developed consciousness, pertaining solely to a linguistic environment, which has separated itself from the Arboreal diffusion and self-absence which Stevenson seeks to relocate through romance but which cannot be accessed through the linguistic apparatus within which he consciously operates.

Putting together all we have said, then, from this and the previous chapter, Stevenson has positioned the Probably Arboreal in contradistinction to its linguistic evolution through the concrete structurality of language. The naturalness of the Arboreal impulse is necessarily expressed via the artificiality of narrative whereby a dislocation is bound to occur between the (invisible) origins of the design-formation and its (visible) linguistic eventuality. For Stevenson, then, the act of writing is characterised by the aporia of having to actualise the Arboreal impulse at a moment when it develops an expressive contact with a linguistic system which cannot support it. Such are the inconveniences of language, as well as the inadequacies of authorial method, that the Probably Arboreal as an originary source can never enter an intelligible space or acquire a visible 'presence' within the domain of the text. In contrast to Frye, Stevenson implements a closure on the transcendental imperatives of literary structure and 'opens', instead, an aporetic tension between the genealogical and artificial stages of narrative production.[8]

In a moment we shall see how Stevenson attempts to resolve, or exploit, this aporia, which he has openly declared, as opposed to Frye who maintains a dependency on transcendental means of signification. The fact that Stevenson undermines the efficacy of romance as a transcendental or metaphorical mechanism is only one of a series of contrasts between the genealogical and cosmological descriptions of romance. It is worth pausing to consider some of these contrasts in detail for what they reveal of the motivations and solutions at stake in the transformation of romance from a conventional to an 'aboriginal' model.

The quasi-Darwinian caricature of the Probably Arboreal is the closest we come with Stevenson to exhuming an originary 'presence' from the midst of fiction. We are consequently compelled to acknowledge a further correspondence between Stevenson and Frye in that both establish an anthropological foundation for literary form and function. In the event, Stevenson anticipates the archetypal critic's dependency on theories of anthropology as a basis for literary study (such as those derived from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*). But, as we should expect by now, Stevenson raises some telling alternatives. The anthropological basis of story-telling is one thing. But the ramifications of the genealogical model are such that its effect on Frye's cosmology is more or less coincident with the impact of Darwinism on the Bible.

Stevenson's descriptions of desire, for example, represent a negation of Frye's allotment of desire to the attainment of civilised goals. Inasmuch as narrative enables the transformation of the conditions of life into realisable goals, it is to allow the re-emergence of the savage interior of civilised man. Romance, in this sense, is far from accessing the metaphysical realms of some apocalyptic totality, approaching only, through endless diversifications of imperfect text, an untranslatable stimulation of 'rude terrors and pleasures'. That which for Frye is anagogical, the conceivable limits of human imagination, becomes for Stevenson biological. The transmission of desire does not occur via imaginative agency, but through the biological succession of one generation superseding another. There are no metaphysical extensions in the Stevenson 'mythos'. There is only 'the aboriginal taproot' of sensations which

obliterate, rather than sublimate, the human subject, and which liberate the subject, not through any ecstatic contact with God, but through an admission of preconscious savagery.

By the same token, romance is not so much an attempt to re-establish contact with the Logos as an attempt to enter narrative phases of unintelligible consequence. The Probably Arboreal is motivated by dysteleological, rather than teleological, imperatives, by those chaotic, nightmare attributes that Frye has associated with the world of nature, the world from which the Probably Arboreal, as a product of natural selection, has evolved. This way, romance represents a reduction of the metaphorical potential of the mythical hero or Godhead to a strictly human level, to a level of primitive zeal, biological primacy and animal gratification. If the 'Logos' is made apparent through the narrative analogue of the 'man who is all men', then it is not through the figure of the glorified-hero, the redeemer or Telos. It is through a single cell of human evolution: not a Christ, but a primate. Frye, moreover, has spoken about romance as signifying 'man's return to an original awareness', meaning his re-attachment to some cosmic order from which he has fallen. For Stevenson, romance narrates man's return to his original awareness, but it is an Arboreal awareness, a condition of being prior to consciousness, irrationality prior to rational method, disorder prior to order, instinct prior to intelligibility. In the modern romance, man is the only creator, and he has nothing to attain but the primeval absence of himself.

This said, we know that the articulation of the Arboreal impulse, linguistically and structurally, is an 'impossible requirement'. The problem for Stevenson, then, is in how to facilitate the Probably Arboreal as an emergent property within the visible text whilst working under the constraints of a visible

textuality. Turning our attentions to this now, it is possible to show how Stevenson attempts to develop a mode of romance which enables the appearance of the Arboreal vitality which occasioned its formation. Given that Stevenson is not seeking to relocate a world from which we have fallen but to reify the aboriginal singularity from which we have 'progressed' (and become separated), it is necessary for him to effect the manipulation and erasure of the conventional strategies upon which the (bogus) re-attainment of the world from which we have fallen is based. Stevenson, in fact, deploys a number of counter-strategies in disqualifying the conventional model of romance and admitting, instead, the unintelligible priority of the Probably Arboreal. These will be explored in more detail in the following section through extended structural analyses of *Will o' the Mill* and *The Ebb-Tide*, albeit they can be summarised here and demonstrated, provisionally, with reference to some of Stevenson's better known texts.

Arboreality and Fiction

These counter-strategies are effective simultaneously in that one necessitates the occurrence of the other and receives the impact of all. It would be useful, then, to summarise them briefly before exploring each successively in detail.

As a consequence of its resistance towards intelligibility, the genealogy of romance allegorises the absence rather than the affirmation of the Logos as a narrative object or centre of meaning, often acting, as we shall see in the course of this and the following chapters, as a metaphorical illustration of the failure of

metaphor. Locally conceived, it is a form of romance that divests itself of its metaphysical referents and draws attention to its status as a structure without foundation. One of the ways Stevenson exposes this lack of foundation (as implied in the previous section) is by exposing the invalidity of the oppositional moral postulates which, according to Frye, organise the structure of romance into an effort towards an idea of the Logos. This, in turn, leads Stevenson towards an elimination of the factitious analogues of mythical christs and demonic villains and the implementation, instead, of locally conceived representations of 'aboriginality' - of figures invested with savage import who, though artificially constructed, nevertheless convey an invalidation of the mythopoeic formula. Bereft of their 'intrinsic' archetypal values, these figures become unpredictable, not constrained to operate according to this or that desirable or undesirable motive. They are, rather, 'morally' equipped to act outside of any moral and, therefore, structural value-system. And this in itself can be seen as part of an attempt by Stevenson to arrange his narratives in such a way as they become material replications or embodiments of an original absence of intelligibility, whereby a sense of aboriginality is effected through the reduction of narrative to a singular condition of language without structure. For it is often the case that Stevenson makes his narratives, in a purely material sense, structurally and semantically irregular and indeterminate so that they become devoid of any hermeneutic circularity or resolution (of a kind that Frye identifies with the quest). To incorporate the Arboreal impulse within structure it is necessary to abandon the structurality of structure, or to structurally re-admit the lack of structurality which occasioned its formation. It is Stevenson's aim, in this sense, to

formulate a 'language of romance'[9] capable of functioning, as it were, prior to and beyond the limitations of conscious method.

As suggested, then, one of the ways in which Stevenson collapses conventional structure is by eliminating its moral designations. According to Frye, we recall, the distribution of archetypal functions are embedded in the moral dichotomy of that which is or is not desirable, of who or what represents good or evil, of who or what is for or against the quest, and so on. Man, Frye maintains,

> ...lives in two worlds, the world of nature and the world of art which he is trying to build out of nature. The world of art, of human culture and civilisation, is a creative process informed by a vision. The focus of this vision is indicated by the polarizing in romance between the world we want and the world we don't want. (*SS*, p. 58)

The formal designations of the archetype are in this respect pre-ordained, as is the moral bifurcation of desire which will determine the structure of romance prior to its event as narrative. With Stevenson, however, the desirable and undesirable alternatives become irregularised and immeshed, their oppositional modality deposed in a radical abandonment of the traditional / ideological aims of romance. The structure of romance is not informed by a vision but by irrational stimuli which precede the polarisation of desire into apocalyptic and demonic counterparts. As much is expressed in essays like 'A Gossip on Romance' where, having grounded romance in 'the ideal laws of the daydream', Stevenson asserts:

> It is not only pleasurable things that we imagine in our day-dreams; there are lights in which we are willing to contemplate even the idea of our own death; ways in which it seems as if it would amuse us to be cheated, wounded or calumniated. It is thus possible to construct a story, even of tragic import, in which every incident, detail and trick of circumstance shall be welcome to the reader's thoughts. (GR, p.164)

It is symptomatic of Stevenson's romances, Penny Fielding observes in response to the above remark, that 'differentiations are not clearly apparent: details become blurred in a general feeling of enjoyment in which life and death, pleasure and pain are not easily separable'.[10] Crucially, with Stevenson, there is no moral bifurcation of desire into that which is desirable and that which is not. Those things which have been deemed desirable or undesirable according to a western metaphysical tradition are, under the irrational designs of the Arboreal impulse, subordinated to an overall need for rude terrors and pleasures. At the root levels of the Probably Arboreal, dialectical oppositions are dissolved and romance responds to a primal inducement which precedes the moral rationalisations of civilised man.

In Stevenson's fictions, the visionary manifestations of the world we want and the world we do not want are obstructed by characters who, symbolically speaking, have no referential basis outside of their own performative function. Whereas, in the archetypal formula, heroes represent metaphorical analogues of messiah figures, Stevenson introduces characters who are artificial configurations of the Probably Arboreal. Without an efficacious bearing (as material representations of primordial states), these figures are nevertheless indicative of the locality of Stevenson's fiction, taking their place, not so much among the archetypal order, as among the discursive matrices of a culture responding to modern theories of evolution. On a lesser level we have characters like Long John Silver and Alan Breck, at once attractive and terrifying because of their pre-structural capacity for savagery and violence. Stevenson presents these characters as part human, part animal, as men endowed with irrational or abnormal attributes which emphasise their

nearness to 'the aboriginal taproot of the race'. On meeting Alan Breck for the first time, we are told:

> He was smallish in stature, but well set and as nimble as a goat; his face was of a good open expression, but sunburnt very dark, and heavily freckled and pitted with the smallpox; his eyes were unusually light and had a kind of dancing madness in them, that was both engaging and alarming....(*Kidnapped*, p. 48)

In contrast to Breck, Silver's 'dancing madness' is translated through his physical deformity: 'His left leg was cut off close by the hip, and under the left shoulder he carried a crutch, which he managed with wonderful dexterity, hopping about upon it like a bird' (*Treasure Island*, p. 48).[11]

More to the point, though, are those localised figures who reflect explicitly the Arboreal tendency in that they are often presented as undergoing a process of becoming Arboreal. The most obvious among such figures is Henry Jekyll. Initially, Jekyll is responding to the unsound ethical policy of removing evil from the soul of man and, to this extent, reflects the dangerous opinion, prevalent after Darwin, that Man could be improved through 'the infinite possibilities of biological engineering'.[12] Far from being an archetype, Jekyll is a localised personification of a post-Darwinian zeal for 'transformationist eugenics' (positing 'the direct manipulation of genetic material by tampering with the inheritance code'); and can be seen to express what Peter Morton describes as 'the rather paradoxical optimism that man, that product of blind forces, has been supplied by those forces with enough intelligent insight into his condition to remedy or at least to reduce the consequences of his own deficiencies'.[13] Unusually for a scientist, Jekyll's outlook is primarily metaphysical in that he 'was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately on that hard

law of life that lies at the root of religion'. His scientific pursuits, he explains, 'led wholly towards the mystic and transcendental' (*The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, p. 81); while it was, he says, 'on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man' (p. 82). Basing his argument upon such suppositions, Jekyll reveals the aim of his experiments:

> If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. (p. 82)

What he discovers instead, however, is the fallacy of man as a creature formed according to any positive moral criteria. The 'double' aspect of Man is not his predisposition towards the metaphysical referents of good or evil, as Jekyll believes: it refers to the aboriginal vitality that inhabits his civilised exterior and which exists, not as a separate faculty of his being, but as one of his genealogical attributes. Through a process which is purely biological, the chemical inducement of the potion disperses the illusion of man as a moral being and enables, through a physical as well as psychological transformation, an impulsive indulgence of rude terrors and pleasures through the homunculus of Hyde. Chief among the characteristics of Hyde, we notice, is 'a complete moral insensibility' (p. 90), whereby 'his every act and thought centred on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another...' (p. 86). Contrary to the metaphysical and moral rationalisations

of Jekyll, the irrational interior of Hyde is motivated by an unintelligible sensationalism. As Jekyll recalls, on experiencing his first transmutation:

> There was something strange in my sensations, something indescribably new and, from its very novelty, incredibly sweet. I felt younger, lighter, happier in body; within I was conscious of a heady recklessness, a current of disordered sensual images running like a mill race in my fancy, a solution of the bonds of obligation, an unknown but not an innocent freedom of the soul. (p. 83 - 84)

It is important to stress that Hyde is by no means a demonic manifestation of Jekyll's 'evil' but, as intimated by Jekyll himself, an informative element of his genealogy. On seeing his reflection as Hyde for the first time, Jekyll relates how 'I was conscious of no repugnance, rather of a leap of welcome. This, too, was myself. It seemed natural and human'(p.84). And, indeed, it is a natural and human aspect of his humanity that it is plied with an Arboreal impetus which represents the fundamental condition of the species to which he belongs. The point is emphasised when, throughout the story, references to Hyde's Arboreal demeanour are noticeably increased, as Jekyll's erroneous suppositions about moral duality are invalidated by the emergence of 'the animal within me' (p. 92). In some ways, Hyde has more of the cave-dweller than the tree-dweller in him, albeit he exudes the same primitive inclinations. As suggested by Utterson: 'There *is* something more, if I could find a name for it. God bless me, the man seems hardly human! Something troglodytic, shall we say?'(p. 40). In the murder scene, meanwhile, the description of Hyde is assuredly Arboreal: 'Mr Hyde broke out of all bounds, and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot, and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway' (p. 47). Likewise, as the story draws to a close,

Jekyll is gradually overwhelmed by the 'ape-like tricks'(p.96) of Hyde, and by 'the action of his ape-like spite'(p. 97), to the point that he is compelled towards a clinical self-destruction. We could say of Jekyll that, in the process of being annihilated, he accomplishes a condition of self-absence which has been achieved, in turn, through the release and recovery of his Arboreal interior. He becomes, precisely, an embodiment of that state of mind - the primeval absence of himself - that Stevenson is seeking to recreate within the context of narrative.

In a similar sense, it is possible to trace an Arboreal vitality in the figure of James Durie (*The Master of Ballantrae*), though he differs enormously from Jekyll or Hyde. In the case of James Durie, the Arboreal impulse is conveyed through his 'deadly, causeless duplicity'[14] which manifests itself as a dysteleological tendency to act without motive. From the very beginning of the tale, in fact, the Master relies on a method of resolution which precludes the possibility of anything being logically or rationally resolved. The decision on who will undertake 'the quest' is not made on the grounds of James's or Henry's suitability as a hero, but on 'the arbitrament of chance' (p. 12) effected through the toss of a coin. The randomness of James's method of resolution prefaces the randomness of the events he will participate in, events which are subject, moreover, to the spontaneous enthusiasm of his 'restlessness and vanity' (p. 12). Likewise, it is impossible to associate him with any pre-determined narrative function. Deliberately invested with an enigmatic tendency to act without reason, the Master appears divested of any symbolic or semantic resonances that may have enabled us to rank him alongside the 'glorified-heroes' of other quests. In the Master, in fact, Stevenson sought to create a central character who, even in the event of his numerous deaths and resurrections, would remain

firmly detached from any mythical structure. Constructing a messiah-figure, Stevenson relates in 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*', was not in the interests of his design-formation. And, in a remarkable contrast to the archetypal credo, he explains:

> The man who should thus be buried was the first question: a good man, whose return to life would be hailed by the reader and the other characters with gladness? This trenched upon the Christian picture and was dismissed. If the idea, then, was to be of any use at all for me, I had to create a kind of evil genius to his friends and family, take him through many disappearances, and make this final restoration from the pit of death, in the icy American wilderness, the last and grimmest of the series.[15]

Stevenson, then, in his adaptation of the quest scenario, embarks on a direct violation of the theme of death and climactic renewal, not only by rejecting the mythical analogue of the hero-as-Christ, but by converting the function of the death / renewal motif (which occurs several times throughout the novel) into a succession of abject disasters. The Master's returns do not result in the revitalisation of the society from which he departed, but in its anti-climactic extinction, which leads us to concur with Adrian Poole's remark that it was 'just such a narrative of regeneration that *The Master* invokes only to reject'.[16] Causelessly disqualifying the mythical determinations of plot,[17] it is rather the case that the Master expresses an Arboreal naturalness whereby, as he puts it himself, 'I go my own way with inevitable motion' (p. 73). Like a force of nature, the Master displays a remarkable indifference towards his fellow man and is easily capable of transcending the moral accusations and arguments employed, for example, by Henry and Mackellar. The best that Henry and Mackellar can do is to resort to the traditional valences of 'good' and 'evil' in attempting to define a man who cannot be defined through overtly rational means;

whereas the Master himself, as he suggests to Burke, is more properly disposed to a condition of savagery that precludes such illusory values: '...if we are to have our noses rubbed together in this course of flight, let us each dare to be ourselves like savages, and each swear that he will neither resent nor deprecate the other. I am a pretty bad fellow at bottom, and I find the pretence of virtues very irksome' (p. 34).

The Probably Arboreal is representative of the illogical convulsions of desire pertaining to a modern idiom which, far from corresponding to Frye's idea of romance, coincides more readily with Penny Fielding's description of 'the late nineteenth-century fantastic with its dangerous yet desirable attraction to the deathly, the sexual, the irrational, and the seemingly abnormal'.[18] In her description of the quest narrative of *The Master*, meanwhile, Fielding draws attention to a structural admission of 'illogical tendencies' and, in doing so, locates the object of romance as a return to primordial origins rather than the attainment of civilised goals. Among other things, Fielding's appraisal of *The Master* demonstrates the way in which Stevenson manipulates the conventional quest scenario in order to allow its Arboreal transformation. Interestingly, though we have not the space to explore it here, Fielding also draws our attention to the relationship, posited in romance, between primordial mental states and the pre-rational states relating to children:

> The masculine romance, with its similarity to the degenerate reading matter for which it was supposed to be the antidote, is precariously poised at the turning-point of this contradictory movement, enacting both an impulse forward, in the quest structure and associations with exploration and conquest, and a backward one in its promotion of barbarism and promise of a return to childhood. And childhood itself stands on in turn a border position between, on the one hand, the embodiment of healthy imperialist values and, on the other, a site at which the operations of unconscious fears and desires are more clearly visible than in later life.[19]

Seen this way, Stevenson constructs his narrative so as to enable the emergence of an unadulterated impulse that is inherently barbaric and which disables the attainment of civilised goals (in this case couched in the aims of colonialism) by allowing the visible re-appearance of pre-structural fears and desires.

As in *Jekyll and Hyde*, it is possible to detect in James Durie a process of becoming Arboreal, though, as Fielding implies, it is not confined to the Master alone. It is a process which pervades the entire narrative and which is emphasised, particularly, through 'The Journey into the Wilderness' of the final chapter. Amid the literally Arboreal setting of the Adirondack forests, the story's characters are exposed to and engage in a rampant savagery which threatens to consume the narrative prior to its actual closure. Significantly, it is not only from within the linguistic visibility of the text that the narrative receives or produces an Arboreal impact. In the implied but undescribed figure of the nocturnal murderer, the narrative, so to speak, is infiltrated by random forces emerging from an invisible region of narrative activity. Following the death of Pinkerton and Hicks, Mackellar tells us, via Mountain's testimony:

> It was clear they had fallen into the hands of one of those matchless Indian bravos, that will sometimes follow a party for days, and in spite of indefatigable travel, and unsleeping watch, continue to keep up with their advance, and steal a scalp at every resting-place. Upon this discovery, the treasure-seekers, already reduced to a poor half-dozen, fell into mere dismay, seized a few necessaries, and, deserting the remainder of their goods, fled outright into the forest. Their fire they left still burning, and their dead comrade unburied. All day they ceased not to flee, eating by the way, from hand to mouth; and since they feared to sleep, continued to advance at random even in the hours of darkness. But the limit of man's endurance is soon reached; when they rested at last it was to sleep profoundly; and when they woke, it was to find that the enemy was still upon their heels, and death and mutilation had once more lessened and deformed their company. (p. 206)

Undescribed, the rogue Indian remains an unintelligible element of structure that produces an effect without having *material*ised as an element in itself. It represents, therefore, the admission of an absence of structurality *within* a structure and, in this sense, enables the Probably Arboreal as an emergent property within a visible textuality that cannot, otherwise, support it.

The interruptive influence of the rogue Indian is symptomatic of *The Master* as a story that, while it involves a quest, never achieves a structural unity or aspect of completion. In *The Master of Ballantrae* the structure of the quest is pivotal, though, properly speaking, it is divided into a series of journeys, as summarised by Stevenson in a letter to E. L. Burlingame: 'The scene of that romance is Scotland - the States - Scotland - India - Scotland - and the States again; so it jumps like a flea'.[20] These journeys, in fact, are hardly a series, hardly, that is, a sequential passage from point A to point B. Viewed together, these journeys do not form a cyclical whole or logical progression: they are geographically spliced and reflexive, temporally indeterminate and narratorially sporadic; they are a random accumulation, says Stevenson, of 'great spaces and voyages' occurring over 'a long evolution of time'. For it was his object in structuring *The Master* 'to carry the reader to and fro in space over a good half of the world, and sustain his interest in time through the extent of a generation'.[21] In recalling how he was inspired by Marryat's *The Phantom Ship*, Stevenson gives further indications as to the initial inducement and subsequent aims of *The Master's* journey-structure: ' "Come," said I to my engine, "let us make a tale, a story of many years and countries, of the sea and land, savagery and civilisation; a story that shall have the same large features and may be treated in the same summary elliptic method as the book you have been reading and admiring" '.[22] It is apparent that, in

implementing 'great spaces', in scattering our attentions 'to and fro in space', in issuing his design-formation through a 'summary elliptic method', Stevenson was intent on constructing a narrative (not so much around a journey as) around absences and omissions. Rather than creating a structure according to a point to point unravelling of conventional associations, he sought to create a structure out of disassociations, out of a lack of structurality, so that the structure would be determined by its opposite quality - contained by that which it did not contain, described by that which it neglected to describe. It would be a narrative that would engender effects without a cause, that would sustain itself according to the absence of any central emanation. It would be directed by its lack of direction and motivated, as Adrian Poole suggests, by its disavowal of 'intelligible motive':

> He [Stevenson] claimed to have taken inspiration from a supernatural thriller of Captain Marryat's. *The Phantom Ship* (1839) tells a version of the Flying Dutchman legend that sprawls promiscuously through time and space, across oceans and continents. It was exactly this sense of the fugitive and volatile that Stevenson wanted at the heart of his own novel, a wild and erratic energy, virtually devoid of intelligible motive, swaying on the edge of the crazy. This took the form of James Durie, the Master, who is at home in peril on the sea, swinging up and down on the brink of the elements.[23]

Through his expressed manipulation of the traditional journey-structure, the idea of the quest as a metaphor is negated by Stevenson. This is achieved, above all, by his ability to effect the journey-structure as a movement without motive so that it is divested, on the whole, of any archetypal basis for intelligibility. *The Master of Ballantrae* evokes a dysteleological aberration of the teleological objectives of the quest scenario and reworks the theme of the journey so that its contingent elements (its conventional functions and ideological prerequisites) are obliterated. It becomes,

instead, an illustration of the absence of order which, as a quest, it is meant to convey.

It is as a consequence of the Arboreal urgency that inundates *The Master* that the narrative itself, as a linguistic structure, becomes a material embodiment of the preconscious absence of intelligibility that enabled its formation. *The Master* is a fractured accumulation of contrasting accounts, a story that constantly undermines its own validity and denies within itself any hermeneutic circularity or resolution. It is based on biased correspondences, on gossip and hearsay; on Mackeller's priggish rhetoric or the bombastic testimonies of Burke; or on the eye-witness accounts of colonial desperadoes like Mountain, whose narrative is delivered second-hand (with significant modifications) through the arch-narrator, Mackellar. Like its main protagonist, the story is a shape shifter, capable of multiple modes of expression; but it is nothing definite in itself. We notice, for example, how Mackellar frequently undercuts Burke's narratives at the same time as including them among his own. When Burke makes a passing reference to the marriage between Miss Graeme and Henry, Mackellar, in a footnote, retorts: '*A complete blunder: there was at this date no word of the marriage: see above in my own narration*' (p. 58). Similarly, Mackellar is prone to making crucial editorial decisions that obscure our reception of the events that 'unfold':

> I drop the Chevalier's narration at this point because the couple quarrelled and separated the same day; and the Chevalier's account of the quarrel seems to me (I must confess) quite incompatible with the nature of either of the men ... The tenor of the narrative (set aside a few flourishes) strikes me as highly ingenuous. (p. 59 - 60)

But not only is Burke's narrative undermined by Mackellar's. The same is true of Mackellar's narrative when subjected to the editorial pretensions of Stevenson himself:

> [Editor's note. - *Five pages of Mr Mackellar's MS. Are here omitted. I have gathered from their perusal an impression that Mr Mackellar, in his old age, was rather an exacting servant. Against the seventh Lord Durrisdeer (with whom ,at any rate, we have no concern) nothing material is alleged.* - R. L. S.] (p. 125)

The material disintegration of the text as a simulation of Arboreal singularity is latterly emphasised as a material absence through the ultimate absence of death. This death not only refers to the death of James and Henry, but to the 'death' of the text as structure capable of delivering a logical series of meanings. It is the absence of any intelligible motive that, finally, reduces the narrative to its 'true' condition - reduces it, in other words, from organic totality to inorganic separation - when, as an epitaph, it is conclusively reduced to the inanimate matter of stone:

J. D.
HEIR TO A SCOTTISH TITLE,
A MASTER OF THE ARTS AND GRACES,
ADMIRED IN EUROPE, ASIA, AMERICA,
IN WAR AND PEACE,
IN THE TENTS OF SAVAGE HUNTERS AND THE
CITADELS OF KINGS, AFTER SO MUCH
ACQUIRED, ACCOMPLISHED, AND
ENDURED, LIES HERE FOR-
GOTTEN.

H. D.
HIS BROTHER,
AFTER A LIFE OF UNMERITED DISTRESS,
BRAVELY SUPPORTED,
DIED ALMOST IN THE SAME HOUR,
AND SLEEPS IN THE SAME GRAVE
WITH HIS FRATERNAL ENEMY.

THE PIETY OF HIS WIFE AND ONE OLD
SERVANT RAISED THIS STONE
TO BOTH

As Penny Fielding has observed of this concluding passage, '...the language of the inscription is itself impossible to pin down with exact meanings', and, in illustrating the point, goes on:

> Henry's epigraph says that he sleeps 'with his fraternal enemy', a phrase as enigmatic as the earlier 'true illusion'. Does this mean that James and Henry were brothers who were enemies, or that they were brotherly, in the sense of friendly, enemies? Or, given the repeated doublings between the brothers, should Mackellar's frequent associations of James with the Devil be extended to Henry? The inscription would then suggest that the brothers were alike in enmity, not of each other, but of humanity.[24]

In relation to Frye's idea of romance, the undecidable meaning of the headstone suggests a point upon which the narrative must inevitably converge in its failure to establish a metaphorical identification with the Logos. This failure is emphasised further by the fact that our attentions have been deflected away from the quest object of the buried treasure which, like the rogue Indian, remains an implied but undescribed element of structure. In this sense, the quest structure hinges on an absence which is asserted, firstly, through the failure to recover the quest object and, secondly, through the subsequent ingression of the text upon an undecidable meaning.[25] The quest structure of *The Master*, in fact, becomes the reverse of metaphor: it is the reduction of language to inscription and, from there, the reduction of inscription to stone itself. It is a text that effects the literalisation of language - language becoming one with something as impenetrable, as material, and as meaningless as language is. Finally, it is the visible absence of meaning in the story,

more tangible and immediate than any illusion of meaning, that produces a purely material sensation of pre-structurality - that is, the Arboreal singularity of something conceived without making sense.

A Summary

Where Stevenson does allow for a mythical expansion of the Arboreal impulse is through its anecdotal association with the nature-god Pan. Nevertheless, the essay 'Pan's Pipes' expresses a pagan fundamentalism that denies the continuation of the mythical structure described by Frye, advocating that 'Pan is not dead, but of all the classic hierarchy alone stands in triumph; goat-footed, with a gleeful and an angry look....'[26] Adapting myth as a means of describing the Arboreal tendency, Pan is used as a figurative template for Stevenson's blurring of extremes - Arboreal terror with pleasure, life with death, glee with anger. He is heralded, by Stevenson, as a figure who precedes any moral reckoning and who, significantly, issues not the undesirable or demonic repulsiveness of nature but its 'dangerous yet desirable attraction'. These extremes are not apocalyptic either, but purely sensational, representative of a primal euphoria from which the civilised man, in his meek pursuit of civilised goals, has become detached. It is noticeable, moreover, that, as far as Stevenson is concerned, the ideology at stake in the pursuit of civilised goals is not a metaphysical but a purely capitalist one:

> ....to hold back the hand from the rose because of the thorn, and from life because of death: this is to be afraid of Pan. Highly respectable citizens who flee life's pleasures and responsibilities keep, with upright hat, upon

> the midway of custom, avoiding the right hand and the left, the ecstasies and the agonies, how surprised they would be if they could hear their attitude mythologically expressed, and knew themselves as tooth-chattering ones, who flee from Nature because they fear the hand of Nature's God! Shrilly sound Pan's pipes; and behold the banker instantly concealed in the bank parlour! For to distrust one's impulses is to be recreant to Pan.[27]

From the dramatic perspective of Stevenson's fiction, the agonies and ecstasies of the Arboreal impulse are not necessarily expressed or received through action and violence alone. It is possible, in fact, to identify the introduction of the strategies outlined above in one of Stevenson's earliest stories, *Will o' the Mill*, a story which deliberately enables a textual immersion of the Arboreal impulse without recourse to fighting, sailoring or similar such episodes of action and brutality. Interestingly, the typical elements of romance (including love) are invoked in *Will o' the Mill* if only to be denied their archetypal function. In this respect, *Will o' the Mill* is an oddity, rather than an odyssey: it is a story in which nothing really happens and which is never developed beyond its immediate circumstance, even though it is announced as a romance and anticipates, in the act of refusing, the structural and semantic criteria of the mythopoeic formula. But it is precisely the structural and semantic dynamic underlying romance that becomes its overriding theme. In drawing attention to the ways in which this dynamic is prone to deconstructing itself, *Will o' the Mill* radically rejects the possibility of narrative as a means of expressing or gratifying desires. Instead, and in an intriguing contrast to his later works, *Will* dramatises the process of becoming Arboreal through the attempt to sustain a pre-structural condition, which is not achieved through a dramatic realisation of the Arboreal impulse. It is achieved, rather, through the actualisation of the aporia involving the impossibility of admitting the Arboreal impulse through a visible textual medium.

Will o' the Mill continually denies the passage of desire as something that can be rendered intelligible and enables it, only and finally, through the unintelligible representation of the passage of desire through death - the vanishing point of narrative.

It is hoped that by exploring this, one of Stevenson's most neglected and, arguably, most important works, and by uncovering some of the strategies at work within it, we may be afforded a better understanding of the anomalies associated with some of Stevenson's more renowned and more widely read compositions. Certainly it is true that *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* more spectacularly, and more famously, explores the drama of man in his evolutionary prime being reduced to his pre-rational interior. The same too can be said for *The Master of Ballantrae*, where the story violently abates in the primeval gloom of the Adirondack forests. But it is possible to see how the principles and positions occurring in these narratives were already being theorised and developed in *Will o' the Mill*. As one of his earliest romances, *Will o' the Mill* sets a precedent for Stevenson's later ones. It is a story that, more blatantly than any of his fictions, invokes the conventions of the mythopoeic model if only to decode and expose them as unstable and invalid. It is a story, moreover, that with explicit thoroughness metaphorically illustrates the failure of metaphor. It is my intention, then, in the first part of the following section, to embark on a detailed analysis which will not only draw attention to the remarkable scope of the story itself, but will also demonstrate the importance of *Will* in relation to Stevenson's fiction as a whole.

If *Will* can be said to set in motion Stevenson's ideas on romance as a modern idiom, the story looked at in the second part of the following section, *The Ebb-Tide*,

might be said to crystallise them. In *The Ebb-Tide*, Stevenson re-introduces the theme of violence. He associates it, however, not with an Arboreal vitality but, in an interesting twist, with the dialectical structure of mythical values imposed against it. It is a story that not only brings to bear on the mythopoeic formula its unsustainability. In *The Ebb-Tide*, the same formula - the moral values it incorporates and the effort towards an idea of renewal it sustains - is revealed as immensely destructive or, at the very least, as a damaging distraction away from 'the primitive and the barbaric which could never quite be left behind'.[28] In *The Ebb-Tide*, moreover, which is, of course, one of Stevenson's later works, the Darwinian element is taken to an extreme: in its attempt to admit an Arboreal impulse, the narrative stops, not at the Adirondack forests. Instead, we encounter the biological fulcrum of the Pacific seas, as Herrick, the story's main protagonist, learns to accept the dysteleological primacy of life for what it is - namely, an 'endless onward process', extending to 'an often pained awareness of human beings as slight elements within unstoppable motion and transformation'.[29]

Notes

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[1] Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, p. 141.
[2] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Manse', *Memories and Portraits*, pp. 72 - 74.
[3] For more on 'heredity' and the influence of Darwin on fiction in general, see Peter Morton's *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860 - 1900* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984). Theories of 'genetic determination' (*The Vital Science*, p. 175), well known to us today, began to emerge in positive terms largely as a consequence of Darwin's theory of evolution. One of the effects of heredity-theory was to show that 'man now stood as the latest and temporary product of nature's assembly-line, a line which ran all the way back to the primordial ooze' (*The Vital Science*, p. 8). Its impact, as we shall see later in this thesis, often provoked pessimistic responses among authors, mainly because of its implications regarding the diminished status of human selfhood. Already we can see, however, that, for Stevenson, heredity was hardly of negative import. Under new and extremely binding terms, it allowed a means through which he could consolidate his typically Scottish obsession with ancestry; whilst offering, as we shall see now and throughout the rest of this thesis, a means through which he could theorise romance as a modern phenomenon.

[4] Stevenson, 'Talk and Talkers', p. 105.

[5] Stevenson, of course, was not alone in seeing the function of romance as a means of admitting primitive states. His friend and contemporary, Andrew Lang, referred to the 'few modern romances of adventure' (of which Stevenson's were undoubtedly the best examples) as 'savage survivals'. As Nicholas Daly has written, romance, for Lang (to whom Daly refers), 'is the raw meat that appeals to the wild man within, variously described by Lang as "the natural man within me, the survival of some blue-painted Briton or of some gipsy", "[T]he savage within us", "the old barbarian [concealed] under our clothes" '. Andrew Lang, 'Realism and Romance', *Contemporary Review*, 52 (1887), pp. 683 - 93, in Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the fin de siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880 - 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 18. The difference between Stevenson and Lang, I think, lies in the former's more explicit incorporation of Darwinian ideas into his thinking about romance; whereas Lang, generally speaking, is more directly concerned with psychoanalytic and anthropological interpretations of romance - of 'the surviving superstitions and stories, the ideas which are in our time but not of it' or of 'the relics of a stage of thought, which is dying out in Europe...'. Andrew Lang, *Custom and Myth* (Wakefield: EP Publishing LTD, 1974), pp. 11 and 13.

[6] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Pastoral', *Memories and Portraits*, pp. 63 - 64.

[7] As an aside to the main analysis, it is worth remarking further on the nature of the author as the author-sibling as envisaged by Stevenson. The idea of the author as a genetic composite is illustrated in Stevenson's essay concerning two beggars - an old soldier and a knife grinder (depicted in the essay 'Beggars', in *Virginibus Puerisque*) - who personify, respectively, the qualities of linguistic artifice and existential dynamism which are perceived by Stevenson as the essential requirements of the authorial tendency. The old soldier, says Stevenson, 'loved the exotic, the unexpected word; the moving cadence of the phrase; a vague sense of emotion (about nothing) in the very letters of the alphabet: the romance of language' ('Beggars', p. 167). The knife grinder, on the other hand 'had a vulgar taste in letters'; but, remarks Stevenson, 'if he had no fine sense of the poetry of letters, he felt with a deep joy the poetry of life' ('Beggars', p. 169). To extrapolate the quality of each and genetically combine them, Stevenson ruminates, would be to produce an author-sibling of the perfect calibre for producing fiction:

> We have here two temperaments face to face: both untrained, unsophisticated, surprised (we may say) in the egg; both boldly charactered:- that of the artist, the lover and artificer of words; that of the maker, the seer, the lover and forger of experience. If the one had a daughter and the other had a son, and these married, might not some illustrious writer count decent from the beggar-soldier and the needy knife-grinder? ('Beggars', p. 170)

It is the author as a biological product, or product of his or her inheritance, that appears to determine his or her capacity for transmitting ideas for stories through the artificial medium of words. Crucially, however, though he contemplates their coalescence, Stevenson maintains a decisive separation between those inherited experiences pertaining to the Arboreal impulse and the materiality of the text that aims to admit or recreate it, so that narrative, in the end, is perpetuated by a desire for something which, because of its material condition, it cannot accommodate.

[8] An interesting parallel can be drawn overall between Stevenson's theory of the creative process and the following one proposed by Roland Barthes (taken from 'Writing Degree Zero'). There are some differences that ought to be pointed out, especially regarding the function of 'style', although the similarities by far outweigh them. For Stevenson, we know, style represents a phase of self-conscious mediation between the mysteries of personality and language - the point at which the creative forces allotted at the hour of birth are subject to the material discrepancies of linguistic execution. For Barthes, style is rather a contingent element of the creative forces allotted at the hour of birth: it is a linguistic manifestation of the mysteries of personality rather than a trial and error accumulation of inadequate acts of choice. Unlike Stevenson, then, Barthes does not imply a transitional rupture or aporia between the mysteries of personality and language. He does, however, resemble Stevenson with his inference that style becomes an ideolectic supplement of language expressing the particularity, as Barthes describes it, of the 'the author's personal or secret mythology' (a phrase which we can readily associate with Stevenson's descriptions of the author-sibling as the product of a genealogical reservoir of 'inherited experiences'). The extract given previously from 'The Manse', in fact, can be seen as an attempt by Stevenson to provide a genealogical map of his 'personal or secret mythology':

> We know that a language is a corpus of prescriptions and habits common to all writers of a period. Which means that a language is a kind of natural ambience wholly pervading the writer's expression, yet without endowing it with form or content: it is as it were an abstract circle of truths, outside of which alone the solid residue of an individual *logos* begins to settle. It enfolds the whole of literary creation much as the earth, the sky, and the line where they meet outline a familiar habitat for mankind. It is not so much a stock of materials as a horizon, which implies both a boundary and a perspective; in short it is the comforting area of an ordered space. The writer literally takes nothing from it; a language is for him rather a frontier, to overstep which alone might lead to the linguistically supernatural; it is a field of action, the definition of, and hope for, a possibility.... [Style], imagery, delivery, vocabulary spring from the body and the past of the writer and gradually become the reflexes of his art. Thus under the name of style a self-sufficient language is evolved which has its roots only in the depths of the author's personal and secret mythology, that subnature of expression where the first coition of words and things takes place, where once and for all the great verbal themes of his existence come to be installed. Whatever its sophistication, style has always something crude about it: it is a form with no clear destination, the product of a thrust, not an intention, and, as it were, a vertical and lonely dimension of thought. Its frame of reference is biological or biographical, not historical: it is the writer's "thing," his glory and his prison, it is his solitude. Indifferent to society and transparent to it, a closed personal process, it is no way the product of a choice or of a reflection on Literature. It is the private portion of the ritual, it rises up from the myth-laden depths and unfolds beyond his area of control... A language is therefore a horizon, and style a vertical dimension.... Roland Barthes, 'Writing Degree Zero', in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag, pp. 31 - 34.

If we were to substitute Barthes's terms for the ones that we have used - 'vertical' for 'genealogical', 'biological', 'natural'; 'horizon' for 'artificial', 'material', 'linguistic' - a correspondence between the two, barring their contrasting designations of the function of style, is highly evident (and we are reminded of Glenda Norquay's insinuations regarding the correspondences between Stevenson and Barthes referred to in chapter three). One other notable difference pertains to Barthes's dismissal of the materiality of language, though he seems to echo Stevenson's insistence on the author's role in giving language the form it lacks. Lastly, it should be said that Barthes seems to maintain a faith in style as a linguistic expression of authorial presence, appearing, then, to rely on a metaphysics of presence in a way that Stevenson, through his indication of a rupture between the Arboreal impulse and the materiality of language, does not.

[9] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Victor Hugo's Romances', *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, p. 8.

[10] Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, p. 199.

[11] In *Victorian Quest Romance*, Robert Fraser offers a summary of *Treasure Island* which can be related to all that has been said in this chapter: 'The enduring popularity of *Treasure Island*, I think, owes much to the fact that in it Stevenson... introduces us to a toy-theatre world, familiar to the unconscious mind of all its readers, which is amoral rather than immoral. The real treasure, in fact, is *the pre-moral nature of man*, the drives that actually motivate, as opposed to supposedly motivate, men and women, in their private and social behaviour' (Italics mine. *Victorian Quest Romance*, pp. 25 - 26).

[12] Morton, *The Vital Science*, p. 107.

[13] Morton *The Vital Science*, p. 121. Jekyll's 'paradoxical optimism' is perhaps not as far fetched as we might think. It resembles, for example, that which was expressed by William Winwood Reade (in 1873): '...these bodies which we now wear belong to the lower animals; our minds have already outgrown them; already we look upon them with contempt. A time will come when science transforms them'. William Winwood Reade, *The Martyrdom of Man* (London: 1925), p. 423, in Morton, *The Vital Science*, p. 107.

[14] Stevenson in a letter to Sidney Colvin, *Letters, vol. II*, p. 88.

[15] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*', in *The Master of Ballantrae*, ed. Adrian Poole (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 223.

[16] Adrian Poole in his introduction to *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. xii.

[17] The 'mythical' status of Stevenson's work and, in particular, *The Master* has often been commented on erroneously, I think, a fact that becomes all the more discernible in the light of Poole's highly

perceptive remark. In attempting to reinstate Stevenson's work among the realms of 'serious' fiction, Leslie Fiedler has argued - in noticeably Jungian terms - that it follows a pattern beginning with 'the outward Romance of incident, the boy's story or thriller, and moves through allegory, often elusive, to the naive or unconscious evocation of myth'. Leslie Fiedler, 'RLS Revisited', in *Collected Essays*, vol I (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), p. 298. In this sense, Fiedler seems to take a similar position to Frye as regards the analogous relations of romance to myth, and attempts to justify Stevenson's work accordingly. 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*', however, invalidates Fiedler's well-intended remarks by demonstrating the novelist's *conscious* evocation and denial of myth; while the novel itself, as Poole has suggested, evokes myth if only to reject its allegorical implications altogether.

[18] Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, pp. 198 - 199.

[19] Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, p. 198.

[20] Stevenson, *Letters, vol. II*, p. 91.

[21] Stevenson, 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*', p. 225.

[22] Stevenson, 'The Genesis of *The Master of Ballantrae*', p. 222.

[23] Adrian Poole in his introduction to *The Master of Ballantrae*, p. ix.

[24] Fielding, *Writing and Orality*, p. 177.

[25] Stevenson, in fact, repeats this technique in *The Ebb-Tide*, a text which I will look at later. In *The Ebb-Tide*, available quest-objects present themselves in the form both of the cargo of champagne and Attwater's horde of pearls. While the former turns out to be bogus, the latter is never revealed and is only assumed to exist. It remains, therefore, though of pivotal importance, an invisible aspect of narrative. It is worth pointing out, meanwhile, that Joseph Conrad adopts the same ploy in *Victory*, a novel which runs suspiciously close to *The Ebb-Tide*. *Victory* is the story of a European, Heyst, who has taken up private residence on a Malayan island and who is rumoured to have made his fortune there by running a coal mine (which actually failed). Later, three colonial vagrants, led by 'Mr. Jones', arrive on the island intent on murdering and robbing Heyst. The 'plunder', however, that Heyst has allegedly 'buried or put away on the island' (*Victory*, p. 181) is merely the product of a hotel-keeper's, Schomberg's, noxious delusions: it is assumed to but does not exist. The chaos that envelops Heyst and his lover, Lena, at the hands of Mr Jones and his accomplices is consequently based on an existing nothingness - on an aspect of narrative (Heyst's money) that never makes a visible appearance. See Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

[26] Robert Louis Stevenson, 'Pan's Pipes', *Virginibus Puerisque*, p. 126.

[27] Stevenson, 'Pan's Pipes', pp. 127 - 128.

[28] Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1983), p. 127.

[29] The expression is Gillian Beer's, from *Darwin's Plots*, p. 127.

Part Three

Will o' the Mill and *The Ebb-Tide*

Chapter Five

The Inversion of the Quest: *Will o' the Mill*

Will o' the Mill presents itself as a fable, as a folk tale, as a 'naive' abstraction of the kind of 'sentimental' romances that Stevenson would later write - the more 'literarily' advanced, 'displaced' romances of *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *The Ebb-Tide* and so on. It is tempting to see in Stevenson's work a consecutive movement, which accords precisely to Frye's scheme, ranging, in miniature, from the naive to the sentimental extremes of fiction. *Will* (which is among his earliest stories) and *The Ebb-Tide* (with its contemporary correspondences to Stevenson's own historical and cultural location) appear to initiate and complete a linear shift which coincides with Frye's principle of displacement.[1] Stevenson's works do show a degree of increased sophistication throughout his career, of generic, stylistic and thematic expansion. They do amount to something *like* a series of displacements. But *Will o' the Mill*, as I will presently show, begins from a position which purposively scrambles the structural integrity of naive romances. It is a story, in this sense, that provides us with a useful prelude to the narrative anomalies encountered in the more 'sophisticated', sentimental developments, such as those we have identified in *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The Master*, and those we shall see in *The Ebb-Tide*.

Fables and folk tales, according to Frye, represent the structural bases of narrative. They explicitly reveal the same archetypal formulae that are implicitly encoded in the more complex forms designated by Frye, through their various stages,

as displacements. Deliberately aligned by Stevenson as a fable, *Will o' the Mill* should be seen to perform a similar range of functions, and to work according to the same principles of abstraction and formulaic arrangement.[2] Likewise, it should be seen (if we are strictly adhering to Frye) to demonstrate the same motivations and ideological solutions at stake as narratives do when they pass from, and through, their archetypal to their anagogic phases. Frye, we recall, has summarised these as 'the polarisation of ideal and abhorrent worlds, which we have seen as central to romance' (*SS*, p. 80).

If *Will o' the Mill* is to conform to the structural criteria of romance as formally stated by the archetypal critics, then the basic, comparative models offered here by Frye and Joseph Campbell should offer, in return, an adequate model for *Will o' the Mill*. Extrapolating the structure of romance in its most rudimentary format, both Frye and Campbell have established three essential stages constituting the narrative 'organism' or, in Campbell's words, the 'nuclear unit'[3] of romance. The two roughly correspond, as we shall see, to fuse a mythopoeic (Frye) or monomythic (Campbell) embryo of narrative structure which determines the generic design of all myths and romances over time, ranging from preliterate fables to the most modern science-fictions. First, we have Campbell's 'nuclear unit of the monomyth':

> *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.*[4]

Secondly, we have Frye's mythopoeic formula:

> The complete form of romance is clearly the successful quest, and such a completed form has three main stages: the stage of the perilous journey

> and the preliminary minor adventures; the crucial struggle, usually some kind of battle in which the hero or his foe, or both, must die; and the exaltation of the hero. We may call these three stages respectively, using Greek terms, the *agon* or conflict, the *pathos* or death-struggle, and the *anagnorisis* or discovery, the recognition of the hero, who has clearly proved himself to be a hero even if he does not survive the conflict. (*AC*, pp. 186 - 187)

Both critics assert similar criteria: a preliminary entry into the world of adventure; a medial stage of climactic struggle; and a conclusive stage involving the hero's messianic transfiguration. These, then, are the fundamental bases from which the archetypal and anagogic framework takes form.

Will o' the Mill is a story which inscribes its generic status upon every narrative level. Its opening sentence - 'The Mill where Will lived with his adopted parents stood in a falling valley between pine-woods and great mountains' (p.175) - is not so much an opening sentence as a declaration of generic intent. The following extracts, taken from some fables and folk tales collected by Andrew Lang, offer a range of 'authentic' variables:

> An old couple once lived in a hut under a grove of palm trees, and they had one son and one daughter.
>
> In the middle of a great forest there lived a long time ago a charcoal-burner and his wife.
>
> A long time ago a little town made up of a collection of low huts stood in a tiny green valley at the foot of a cliff.
>
> Once upon a time there were a man and a woman, who had an only daughter.[5]

Seen in this context, *Will o' the Mill's* opening sentence is a motif, a signal, an archetypal assertion of pre-quest domesticity, the integral components of which are clearly stated as work, family and home. Coinciding with Campbell, it is the

'*common day*' world in which the story begins; and it is only in keeping with our generic expectations that Will should outgrow the narrative embryo of domestic irrelevance and emerge as 'the one who has deliberately undertaken the difficult and dangerous journey beyond the village compound'.[6] Likewise, on an anagogic level, the opening paragraph - as a tautological derivation of the once-upon-a-time motif - is effectively telling us that this story exists in a state of abstraction and refinement, that it lies closer to a world of myth than of secular experience. It only remains for the hero, Will, to surmount the various obstacles set against him and to establish an omnific contact between the fallen world of domestic irrelevance and the cosmic totality from which it, and he, has fallen.

As if these signals are not enough, Stevenson sign-posts his narrative by attaching separate headings to each of its three sections, each heading acting as a semiotic abstraction of each particular section, in a move which externalises the structural interior of the narrative so as to reveal, prior to our involvement as readers, the story's structural sequence as it is liable to occur. This way, *Will o' the Mill* foreshadows, corresponds to or pre-empts the three essential stages of the mythopoeic / monomythic formula, as this provisional synopsis suggests:

a) In 'The Plain and the Stars' we have an immediate grounds for a preliminary entry into the world of adventure made possible by a prospective conflict between oppositional values. Such a suggestion might seem over-pitched if it wasn't for the fact that, in the plain and the stars, we recognise the oppositional modality of the fallen, or real, and cosmic, or ideal, worlds. Will's quest will evidently arise out of a conflict of values embedded in each - his repugnance for the plain (bearing in mind that for 'plain' we could also read 'commonplace', 'mundane', 'quotidian')

versus his apocalyptic yearning for the stars (the cosmic or heavenly). Prelusively, we have an appropriate site for 'the conflict of desire and reality' (*AC*, p. 105) which Frye has asserted as the structural determinant of romance. The opening sentence seems to emphasise the potential spectacle in drawing attention to Will's homestead as being situated above a '*falling* valley' (italics mine), as if, in being where he is, Will is positioned just above a lower world and just below a higher one, apparently occupying a middle ground of precarious neutrality between a higher world of heaven and a lower world of hell. We recognise already, then, the anagogic significance of *Will o' the Mill*, which begins by asserting Frye's romance criterion of 'a contrast between two worlds, one above the level of ordinary experience, the other below it' (*SS*, p. 53), with the character of Will poised between the two.

b) In 'The Parson's Marjory' it is possible to envisage a medial stage of climactic struggle involving the hero's attempt to attain a suitable quest-object, in this case personified in the figure of Marjory. Having defined the relation between the structural and semantic components of the archetypal scenario, Frye suggests that, on one level of meaning, 'the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfilment that will deliver it from reality' (*AC*, p. 193). Marjory, then, appears to be the catalyst for Will's 'romantic thrust of sexuality and wish-fulfilment' (*SS*, p. 58), the attainment of which will deliver him from the undesirable realities of his domestic situation. On another level, however, Marjory acquires an anagogic significance in that, as the parson's daughter, she is instantly imaged as religiously chaste - analogous, in this sense, to 'the archetype of all romantic virgins who marry and live "happily" ever after'. As such, she is announced in advance as a

symbolic object of cosmic renewal, representative 'not only of a descent from a higher world but a permanent return to it' (*SS*, p. 87).

c) 'Death' implies some kind of apocalyptic transfiguration, involving the apotheosis or exaltation of the hero - albeit the suggestion is that the hero does not survive the conflict overall. Given the semantic rigidity of the section heading 'Death', however, we cannot be certain as to whether or not Will succeeds in bestowing boons upon his fellow man or in activating a cosmic regeneration of the cyclical world of nature.

In the section headings, then, Stevenson has established a series of structural stages which, as we have seen, correspond to the mythopoeic / monomythic formula provided by Frye and Campbell. But, in so doing, Stevenson problematises the implications of an archetypal reading. In the first place, he has extrapolated the archetypal interior of his narrative and, in the form of signatory headings, positioned it on the *outside* of his text. What Frye calls the 'symbolic spread' (*SS*, p. 59) of archetypes is brought to the surface, decoded and exposed, no longer a central mechanism or core of 'irreducible' meanings from which the archetypal and anagogic phases assume the complexities of form. The narrative structure of *Will o' the Mill* has, in effect, been turned inside out: it is structurally coherent on the outside; what remains to be seen is whether it is structurally coherent on the inside. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate otherwise, that *Will o' the Mill* deliberately works against the grain of the assumptions it asserts, that it purges itself of the archetypal referents which, even at the moment of inscribing them upon a visible textual surface, it shows to be unstable, inadequate and lacking in absolute foundation.

This chapter, then, will engage in an archetypal reading of a story that makes such a reading impossible. It will show how Stevenson theorises in *Will o' the Mill* that which, in his later works, becomes repeatedly pronounced, namely, a calculated dislocation of the values upon which the mythopoeic formula sustains itself metaphorically. This, though, is no abject demolition. It is a move to unhinge the structural and semantic efficacy of conventional forms and formulae by means of moving inside of them, of entering a kind of quantum level of narrative activity and exposing the singularities, as opposed to the incorruptible certainties, which inhabit their interior. In response to this manoeuvre, Stevenson disqualifies the metaphorical unity of romance as a means of expressing or satisfying desire and, from there, inundates the vacuum of meaning at its centre, which he reveals, with an aboriginal condition of pre-structurality and self-absence.

'The Plain and the Stars'

Will o' the Mill begins by entering the established modality of romance, accentuating in and around the figure of Will the conflict between desire and reality according to which romance conventionally operates. With the movement 'of people going in one direction... tending downward like the river that accompanied their path' (p. 175), a teleological order is evoked whereby the narrative appears likely to be determined by what it describes. Will desires to enter this order but, in being confined to the domestic irrelevance of the mill, is painfully aware of his exclusion from it. On the outbreak of the 'disastrous war' (p. 175), the 'weariness, pity and wonder' (p. 176)

he feels is not for the sake of the war-torn legions: it is an emotional expenditure arising from his need to pursue, like them, an undisclosed eventuality: 'Whither had they all gone? Whither went all the tourists and pedlars with strange wares? whither all the brisk barouches with servants in the dicky? whither the water of the stream, ever coursing downward and ever renewed from above' (p.176)? But it is through his observations of nature that Will begins to define his position of exclusion more sharply:

> Even the wind blew oftener down the valley, and carried the dead leaves along with it in the fall. It seemed like a great conspiracy of things animate and inanimate; they all went downward, fleetly and gaily downward, and only he, it seemed, remained behind, like a stock upon the wayside. It sometimes made him feel glad when he noticed how the fishes kept their heads up stream. They at least stood faithfully by him, while all else were posting downward to the unknown world. (p.176)

Among Will's surroundings, water forms the most powerful imagery and, in the case of the river, is especially consistent with the quest scenario. It is easy enough to read in the river a symbolic projection of Will's desire to traverse the plain according to the same linear / cyclical tendency. However, while the river represents a point of identification for Will, it is a very tenuous one: his strongest point of identification is not with the river, but with the fish - with those elements, in other words, that resist the teleological mainstream from which Will, like the fish, is excluded.

In the fish, it is possible to recognise the emergence of tangent metaphors that disrupt, rather than regulate or conjoin, the metaphorical uniformity of *Will o' the Mill*. These incendiary elements are neither for nor against the anticipated quest, neither diametrically determined nor representative of any conventional value. The fish, remaining static with heads upstream, occupy a position of neutrality in relation

to the order they inhabit. Already, then, there is an unevenly balanced simultaneity - a dysteleological counter-action acting from *within* the story's resident teleology - which, in the course of Will's predicament, becomes increasingly pronounced.

At the same time, the symbolic status of water is raised to a level of anagogy, as *Will o' the Mill* continues to expand its mythopoeic potential. The fact that the river, as the miller explains, 'turns a power of mills', 'waters the great corn country, and runs through a sight of fine cities', appears to correspond, analogously, to Frye's summary of river-imagery as featured in myth: 'In apocalyptic symbolism we have the "water of life", the fourfold river of Eden in the City of God.... Apocalyptically, therefore, water circulates in the universal body like blood in the individual body' (*AC*, p. 146). These symbolic resonances are given substance by what we learn of the river's ultimate destination, presented in such terms as we recognise, not only the sea, but a site of omnific totality. In answer to Will's query, 'And what is the sea?', the miller exclaims:

> Lord help us all, it is the greatest thing God made! That is where all the water in the world runs down into a great salt lake. There it lies, as flat as my hand and as innocent like as a child; but they do say when the wind blows it gets up into water-mountains bigger than any of ours, and swallows down the great ships bigger than our mill, and makes such a roaring that you can hear it miles away upon the land. There are great fish in it five times bigger than a bull, and one old serpent as long as our river and as old as all the world, with whiskers like a man, and a crown of silver on her head. (p. 177)

As God's greatest creation, the sea is at once invested with a mythical amplitude, appearing as a kind of nexus between the fallen and cosmic worlds. It represents, that is to say, the origin and eventuality of the river's symbolic course of action, in being both its source (as a consequence of the water cycle) and its ultimate destination. In

keeping with Frye and Campbell, it is possible to think of the sea as a mythical boundary that stands between 'The Plain and the Stars', or as a purgatorial divide between Will's phases of descent and ascent that needs to be crossed if his secular degradation is to be successfully transformed into cosmic revival. It is apparent, again, that the water imagery in 'The Plain and the Stars' offers a symbolic projection of the course of action Will ought to take as the prospective hero of the quest. To overcome the natural and supernatural perils that inhabit the sea should enable him to establish a contact with the omnific source and, by his heroic return or Messianic self-sacrifice, to meliorate the fallen world with regenerative boons.

Having said this, the Miller's description of the sea is based on a rather complex set of allusions. And this, perhaps, problematises our attempts to situate *Will o' the Mill* within the archetypal schema. *Will o' the Mill* is to a large extent an encyclopaedic story, drawing on imagery both from the Christian and pre-Christian traditions. Both traditions are retained at the expense of the other in terms of their absolute value, for no absolute value is offered. While the Christian imagery pertaining to the sea, as God's greatest creation, is furthered somewhat by the Leviathan trope of the 'great fish in it five times bigger than a bull', it is oddly offset by the arrival of an immortal sea monster whose presence pertains more to maritime legend or pagan mythology. The sea, then, appears to contain an amalgamation of incompatible mythical fields, resembling, not so much a purgatorial divide or apocalyptic limit, as a region in which the apocalyptic and demonic alternatives are reduced to a point where neither acquires a positive / negative value to any decisive effect. The sea, we notice, is not only a source of life (in being the ultimate source of the river), but a harbinger of death. It is as equally capable of affecting child-like

innocence as it is of implementing mortal catastrophe: it is both apocalyptic, in its expression of eternity, and demonic, in its expression of the transience of human life. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of neutrality, however, is the androgynous figure of the sea serpent itself, which is both a gargantuan phallus 'with whiskers like a man' and a matrilineal deity 'with a crown of silver on her head'. Given the cross-referential texture of its symbolic composition, the sea, like the fish, appears to establish a tangent metaphoricity which cancels, rather than sustains, the archetypal designations of the mythopoeic structure.

Will o' the Mill, in many ways, is a story about neutrality, and it seeks, as we shall see, to activate neutrality on a variety of narrative levels, not least through the character of Will. To see the sea as a site of omnific neutrality, rather than totality, is to see it, as yet, as an ultimate source, but one that reveals an absence of intelligible structure (by revealing an absence of intelligible goals) which, in turn, gradually pervades the narrative and expends, by extruding, the archetypal functions that refer to it centrally. Instead of producing itself, the narrative is reducing itself to a singular condition; instead of asserting the presence of the Logos, it is asserting the absence of the Logos by purging itself of its logocentric structure.

This becomes clear, however, only after the allure of the plain has had its fullest impact on Will. For Will, the plain is on the opposite end of the spectrum to the fish. The fish represent a point of identification for Will, but only because they appear to share his experience of domestic inaction. The plain, which becomes his object of desire and, so, becomes a more elaborate, less immediate and hitherto unknowable point of identification, has a converse effect: by gradual stages, it scrambles his identity. On reaching 'the hill-top that overlooks the valley and the

plain' (p. 177), Will experiences a visionary apprehension of the apocalyptic order from which he is excluded. But the experience is as agonising as it is ecstatic; and Will's alerted fascination for the plain quickly gives way to an infantile distress:

> Everything was defined and glorified in golden light.... An overmastering emotion seized upon the boy, soul and body; his heart beat so thickly that he could not breathe; the scene swam before his eyes; the sun seemed to wheel round and round, and throw off, as it turned, strange shapes which disappeared with the rapidity of thought, and were succeeded by others. Will covered his face with his hands, and burst into a violent fit of tears... (p. 177)

The significance of this scene, from an archetypal point of view, is notable for its correspondence to the mythical trope of a

> ...symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment, and which we propose to call the point of epiphany. Its most common settings are the mountain-top, the island, the tower, the lighthouse, the ladder or staircase. (*AC*, p. 203)[7]

Anagogically speaking, Will's epiphany is analogous to 'the mountain vision of Pisgah, the end of the road through the wilderness from which Moses saw the distant Promised Land...' (*AC*, p. 204). But whereas the point of epiphany normally, and climactically, secures an alignment between the two worlds, in *Will o' the Mill* it drives them apart or, more accurately, begins to distance Will from the alignment he requires. On the one hand, Will's apprehension of the 'Promised Land' has intensified his desire to enter into it:

> From that day forward Will was full of new hopes and longings. Something kept tugging at his heartstrings; the running water carried his desires along with it as he dreamed over its fleeting surface... It did not matter what it was; everything that went that way, were it cloud or

> carriage, bird or brown water in the stream, he felt his heart flow out after it in ecstasy of longing. (p. 178)

On the other hand, however, the moment of revelation Will has received becomes a torture rather than an insight. What begins as an inducement to the quest is lessened by Will's growing confusion towards his object of desire so long as it remains unattained. In his continued idealisation of the world below, Will begins to sicken, his personality wilt: his epiphany has not so much provided him with inductive powers of heroism as with an Arboreal mania of unsatisfied lusts:

> He was transplanted and withering where he was; he lay in a strange country and was sick for home. Bit by bit, he pieced together broken notions of the world below; of the river, ever moving and growing until it sailed forth into the majestic oceans; of the cities full of brisk and beautiful people.... of the great churches, wise universities, brave armies, and untold money lying stored in vaults; of high-flying vice that moved in the sunshine, and the stealth and swiftness of midnight murder. (p. 179)

It is clear, in view of his torment, that Will's moment of epiphany has occurred prematurely and has become, as an archetype, structurally and semantically void. It occurs at a stage where Will, as yet, is disengaged from the process of the quest, so that it 'reveals' nothing except a sense of something in the world which is 'there' to be discovered, but which lies outside of his experience. As a consequence, Will superimposes upon the plain an array of 'broken notions' which are not so much an apocalyptic actuality as a series of metaphorical substitutions for the absence of any definite object of desire. We soon suspect that Will is focusing his desires on misconceptions, exaggerations and fallacies, that he is, in short, creating a romance of the plain which is not so much a visionary apprehension as the product of his estrangement from the *thought* of the world he craves. It is a measure of his emergent

neutrality, meanwhile, that the images of paradise he associates with the cities are accompanied by a desire for material indulgences, prostitution and homicidal violence. Will fuses everything together in a general picture of pleasure and excess: he begins to idealise the demonic as well as apocalyptic alternatives and, as a result, cancels their value as desirable or undesirable objects of the (anticipated) quest. For Will, the objects of his desire are envisaged but undecidable. They are the efforts, not ideas, of a 'hero' who is unable to reconcile himself to non-existent mythical targets and whose desire, finally, begins to assume its natural - that is, its Arboreal - aspect. Later, we notice, Will exposes the characteristic neutrality of his desire during his counsels with the 'fat young man': 'But you would not have me die like a dog and not see all that is to be seen, and do all that a man could do, let it be good or evil?' (p. 182).

And these, perhaps, are symptoms of a character who, existing prior to and outside of the teleological mainstream of the quest, inhabits a pre-structural condition that precedes the world as made intelligible and presentable through the conventional structure of romance. The narrator's own analysis implies as much: 'I have said he was sick as if for home: the figure halts. He was like someone lying in twilit, formless pre-existence, and stretching out his hands lovingly towards many-coloured, many-sounding life' (p. 179). By 'constructing' his imagined impressions of life on the plain, Will is attempting to compensate for his absence from it; but, because of his absence, he cannot make his impressions intelligible. He is constructing a romance of the world around and beyond him that undermines the conventional criteria of romance and, in this way, is doing from within what Stevenson is doing from without, constructing a romance that, in effect, is deconstructing itself.

In being unaware of this, Will continues to project his unintelligible 'design-formation' upon a world that cannot support it. Like an accustomed metaphysician, however, he invests the absence of decidable meaning with transcendental significations which, while they 'exist' outside of his experience, ratify (within the context of his imagination at least) an available truth or 'true life': '... he was... full of desires and aspirations, itching at the fingers, lusting with the eyes, whom the whole variegated world could not satisfy with aspects. The true life, the true bright sunshine, lay far out upon the plain' (p. 179). And, in this respect, Will is behaving a bit like Frye and Campbell, accepting the validity of the Logos as a narrative object, even while it remains outside of his referential and experiential range. He fills the vacuum of absence with an imaginary presence of truth, substitutes the 'possible attempt' of the sign for 'an impossible conception', and in this way constructs a vision of the world as traditionally conceived through romance.

Will, of course, is unaware of what he is doing. We, however, are given conclusive evidence of the absence of meaning that inhabits Will's prospective quest through the narratorial interlude of the fable within the fable. The fable within the fable is an allegory that illustrates the failure of allegory, outlining, in general terms, that which is outlined privately by Will - namely, the human tendency to superimpose on the world of man and nature an erroneous world of mythical values:

> That divine unrest, that old stinging trouble of humanity that makes all high achievements and all miserable failure, the same that spread wings with Icarus, the same that sent Columbus into the desolate Atlantic, inspired and supported these barbarians on their perilous march. There is one legend which profoundly represents their spirit, of how a flying party of these wanderers encountered a very old man shod with iron. The old man asked them whither they were going; and they answered with one voice: 'To the Eternal City!' He looked upon them gravely. 'I have sought it,' he said, 'over the most part of the world. Three such pairs as I

> now carry on my feet have I worn out upon this pilgrimage, and now the fourth is growing slender underneath my steps. And all this while I have not found the city.' And he turned and went his own way alone, leaving them astonished. (p. 179)

Again, Stevenson is taking us into the archetypal core of his work in order to oust and eliminate its archetypal values. And Will, we find, begins to do the same.

Following Stevenson, Will begins to sign-post the 'narrative' of the world that lies beyond his immediate experience, so that, like a reader, he begins to recognise its metaphorical inefficacy. Though he maintains a reverence for the teleological world-order, Will begins to sense that this order is not a real one, that it is not a 'literal' world, but a world made up of factitious symbols. Accordingly, the symbolic determinations of the narrative are placed outside of his experience, much in the same way as they are placed outside of our reading experience in their abstracted state as section headings: 'Hitherto the traffic on the road had passed by Will, like something seen in a picture... but for the most part it had been a mere symbol, which he contemplated from apart and with something of a superstitious feeling' (p. 180). So far, Will's superstitions are the same as those of a metaphysician like Frye, where the elected symbols are assumed to naturally contain and convey the metaphysical objects they refer to. But it is in the figure of Will himself wherein the archetypal fallacy is finally revealed.

Will, we have said, inhabits a pre-structural neutrality. At the circumference of his experience is an imagined teleology in relation to which he, as protagonist, is a kind of detached centre. His absence from this order mirrors the absence within it of any intelligible object of desire so that, in *Will o' the Mill*, the quest structure is enclosed, on either side of its (non-existent) duration, by absence. In his eventual

realisation of this, Will's involuntary absence from the quest becomes a voluntary absence. This realisation, however, does not come to him of his own accord. It is prompted by a passing stranger, a 'fat young man', who draws attention to the fact that, in his present condition, Will is wishing for 'a great many things which you will never get' (p. 181). In explaining the matter, the fat young man does two things: firstly, he contrasts the real universe with the mythical one in order to negate the validity of the latter; and, secondly, he evokes a mythical means of interpretation in order to illustrate the failure, precisely, of mythical means of interpretation. Of 'the worlds turning about each other in the midst of space', the young man says:

> We do not know what there may be in any of them; perhaps the answer to all our difficulties or the cure to all our sufferings: and yet we can never reach them.... We may climb the highest mountain, and we are no nearer to them ... The mountain and the mouse. That is like to be all we shall ever have to do with Arcturus or Aldebaran. Can you apply the parable? (pp. 182 - 183)

The argument, finally, is overwhelming. If the mythical universe exists, then it is out of reach of human knowledge and experience and, like the names of the stars 'Arcturus' and 'Aldebaran', can only be inadequately expressed through signs or symbols which, in themselves, are without self-present meaning. Crucially, Will's reaction to the young man's analogy of absence is one of acceptance. In summarising the parable in his own words, he repudiates the mythical definition of the world as he formerly saw it by restricting its metaphorical exorbitance to a nullifying cliché: ' "I see," he said, turning to the young man. "We are in a rat-trap" ' (p.183). This admission signals Will's conscious abstention from the world of conventional romance. While his imagined environment has provided him with a structural model for the quest, Will, the most necessary element of the quest, has finally 'inserted' his

absence. In the same way that Stevenson has effected an extrusion of the archetypal order by placing it on the outside of his narrative, Will has effected an extrusion of the archetypal order from within the narratorial core of his own experience. Like an author, he has conceived of a desire- / design-formation which he cannot replicate in the 'narratorial space' of his life because his life, like writing, is subject to material limitations. Viewed metaphorically, then, we discover in 'The Plain in the Stars', not an individual manifestation of the mythopoeic formula, but the failure of romance to sustain its status as 'man's vision of his own life as a quest' (*SS*, p. 15).

'The Parson's Marjory'

Contrary to what the section headings implied, the parson's Marjory was not, as it happened, the catalyst for Will's initial 'romantic thrust of sexuality and wish-fulfilment'; and this is a further indication of Stevenson's determination to disrupt our expectations of romance. However, if Will has forgone the quest inasmuch as it involves 'leaving the village compound', he is presented with a secondary quest-object in the prospective sexual union with the parson's daughter. This, at least, seems likely if we consider Frye's suggestion that there are, among the mythical topoi, some 'analogous forms of the point of epiphany', one of which, he relates, 'may be presented in erotic terms as a place of sexual fulfilment, where there is no apocalyptic vision but simply a sense of arriving at the summit of experience in nature' (*AC*, p. 205). There is a definite sense in which Will, in pursuing Marjory,

may accomplish a regenerative contact with the mythical universe; especially so if we recall the symbolic latitude of Marjory as the parson's daughter.

As a structural element, Marjory acts as a substitution for the apocalyptic goals which came to Will, previously, as broken notions. This time, however, the object of his desire appears decidable and, for the most part, attainable, falling well within the limited range of his knowledge and experience. As such, *Will o' the Mill* appears to have reasserted its archetypal foundations, and in such as way as may lead us to anticipate further developments along the lines of 'a grammar of conventions'. A ritual ratification of sexual union, culminating in the archetype of the marriage ceremony, would seem the most appropriate scenario, given, as Frye suggests, 'that most romances exhibit a cyclical movement of descent into a night world and a return to the idyllic world, or to some symbol of it like a marriage...' (*SS*, p. 54). It is apparent that if 'The Parson's Marjory' is to take us closer to a traditional model of romance then it ought to convey either the imminent success of Will's climactic union with Marjory or his glorious failure to achieve it with a happy outcome. But it is rather the case that Stevenson, having dislocated the mythopoeic formula in terms of its involving a geographical quest, presents the archetype of sexual union as an emotional quest, if only to prepare the grounds for its dislocation also.

Our expectations of a burgeoning love interest between Will and Marjory are at once enhanced in the opening paragraphs of 'The Parson's Marjory'. However, as with the tangent metaphors in 'The Plain and the Stars', there are tangent indications, here, of a disruption in the metaphorical fabric of tale. While Marjory appears to have preserved her chastity for Will, it is noticeable that she is not untainted by rumours and petty scandal: 'She held her head very high, and had already refused

several offers of marriage with a grand air, which had got her hard names among the neighbours' (p. 184). There is an element of immoral cunning associated with the parson, moreover, which further undermines the integrity of the emergent marriage motif. On inheriting 'the inn, and the mill, and the old miller's savings', Will has become 'a man of substance', so that, on choosing to live there, it is reckoned, 'among their ill-wishers, that the parson and his daughter had not chosen their temporary lodging with their eyes shut' (p. 184). Ultimately, it is economic greed that underlies the parson's motives for initiating a sexual union between his daughter and Will, in a move which, in effect, subordinates her moral chastity to an abject materialism. Hardly representative of a permanent return to a higher world, Marjory's symbolic function appears infected at root with its opposite quality.

Similarly, tangent indications abound of Will's unsuitability as the hero of a love tale in that, having abstained from the quest, he has become 'full of notions' which are not so much broken as they are impenetrable and dogmatic. He has become, by now, 'a kind, talkative, inscrutable young man', who 'kept calling the plainest common sense in question' and 'soon began to take rank in the district as a bit of an oddity' (p. 183). This is not the Will of old, consigning himself to aimless fantasies; so much so that, in spite of the parson's surreptitious designs,

> ...Will was about the last man in the world to be cajoled or frightened into marriage. You only had to look into his eyes, limpid and still like pools of water, and yet with a sort of clear light that seemed to come from within, and you would understand at once that here was one who knew his own mind, and would stand to it immovably. (p. 184)

It is significant that Stevenson has re-applied the water-imagery of the first section to symbolise, in this instance, not a teleological mainstream or omnific source, but, in

the form of isolated pools grown apart from rivers and oceans, Will's intractable neutrality and wilful disengagement from the cycle of renewal.

If not to be duped so easily into marriage, Will's libidinal desires are nevertheless aroused by Marjory. It is a measure of the extent to which Will, previously, had superimposed his own factitious design-formation on the world of nature that, on the arrival of the metaphorical substitute of Marjory, nature relapses into its actual absence of intelligible structure:

> ...the remainder of created things became no more than a blot by comparison; and if Will glanced away from her to her surroundings, the trees looked inanimate and senseless, the clouds hung in heaven like dead things, and even the mountain-tops were disenchanted. (p 185)

In his obsessive regard for the parson's daughter, Will reapplies his design-formation or, rather, 'displaces' it from one object of devotion to another. Re-invoking the epiphany of his youth, he begins to fashion a context for Marjory as the omnific source in human form:

> He became conscious of a soul beautifully poised upon itself, nothing doubting, nothing desiring, clothed in peace... To Will, her presence recalled something of his childhood, and the thought of her took its place in his mind beside that of dawn, of running water, and of the earliest violets and lilacs. It is the property of things seen for the first time after long, like the flower in spring, to re-awaken in us the sharp edge of sense and that impression of mystic strangeness which otherwise passes out of life with the coming of years; but the sight of a loved face is what renews a man's character from the fountain upwards. (p.185-186)

Marjory's state of undesiring represents the ultimate point of attainment for Will who appears confident that, by 'waiting patiently in his own narrow valley, he also had attained the better sunlight' (p. 186). It is, however, a hollow assumption on Will's behalf that he is bound to undergo his apocalyptic transfiguration prior to its event.

For, while he seems to have abandoned his characteristic neutrality and to have discovered in Marjory a valid object of desire, his subsequent course of (in)action proves otherwise.

Will's conduct towards Marjory appears to contradict his image of her as an object of omnific renewal. While the visionary Marjory 'was never out of Will's mind for an instant'(p. 187), Marjory herself is kept at a certain distance: ''Tis as if there were a circle round me, which kept every one out but you; I can hear the others talking and laughing; but you come quite close' (p. 186). Sitting at the table, she comes 'quite close', but never fully enters into his imagined mythical tableaux. Indeed, in 'The Parson's Daughter' we are offered two versions of Marjory: the idealised Marjory of Will's imagination and the actual Marjory of his experience. Will is unable to reconcile the two; and if, at first, he gives no explicit acknowledgement of this, his actions indicate otherwise:

> The most enchanting thoughts presented themselves unbidden in his mind. He was so happy that he could not sleep at night, and so restless that he could hardly sit still out of her company. And yet it seemed as if he avoided her rather than sought her out. (p.188)

In 'The Plain and the Stars', Will attempted to project his desire upon objects of attainment which did not exist. With Marjory, though she exists, he is doing something of the same. He invests her with a factitious mythical agency which, in reality, she does not possess, creating an image of attainment that supersedes the actuality of attainment. As an object of attainment, she by no means offers a climactic resolution, but only accentuates, by embodying, its actual absence and, so, cancels rather than manifests the permanent return to a higher world which she is meant to represent. In response to this rupture which he has imposed on himself,

Will, having learnt from his experiences in 'The Plain and the Stars', begins to theorise a position of neutrality which can work to his advantage. Realising that the possession of Marjory can only expose the absence of the mythical one, Will stages a strategic avoidance of Marjory (once as a matter of course, now as a matter of principle). He attempts to sustain, through its postponement, the illusion of mythical renewal, rather than confront the reality of its impossible conception, and, to this effect, is able to indulge his desire for omnific renewal without experiencing its anti-climactic erasure. The principle suggests itself to Will after discussing with Marjory her reasons for picking flowers which, he says, 'look a great deal better off where they are...':

> 'I wish to have them for my own,' she answered, 'to carry them near my heart, and keep them in my room. They tempt me when they grow here; they seem to say, "Come and do something with us"; but once I have cut them and put them by, the charm is laid, and I can look at them with quite an easy heart.'
>
> 'You wish to possess them,' replied Will, 'in order to think no more about them. It's a bit like killing the goose with the golden eggs. It's a bit like what I wished to do when I was a boy. Because I had a fancy for looking out over the plain, I wished to go down there - where I couldn't look out over it any longer. Was not that fine reasoning? Dear, dear, if they only thought of it, all the world would do like me; and you would let your flowers alone, just as I stay up here in the mountains'. (p. 188)

Having recovered his dogmatic swagger, it occurs to Will that the moment of attainment is always already inhabited by its opposite quality - absence. Following the analogy of the golden goose, to fully possess the object of desire is not to renew, but to annihilate. To see it this way, the moment of attainment is simultaneous with a moment of loss. And marriage too, Will realises, means possession, the revelation of absence - not, as Frye defines it, the return to a higher world. Knowing that, should they marry, the charm would be laid and the desire annihilated, Will tells Marjory:

> I do not think getting married is worth while. I would rather you went on living with your father, so that I could walk over and see you once, or maybe twice a week, as people go to church, and then we should both be all the happier between whiles. That's my notion. (p.190)

It is noticeable that, in order to avoid absence, Will, again, has inserted his absence within the structural relations of romance, though under very different conditions to those in 'The Plain and the Stars'. Confident (mistakenly) that his notions have been properly received by Marjory, and seemingly reciprocated, Will is able to exploit his position of self-absence. There is no absolute gratification in this pre-structural condition, no fulfilment or unfulfilment; only a kind of stimulating neutrality which is maximised to full effect by Will, who cunningly intensifies his desire by ritualistically denying its (im)possible fruition:

> For nearly three years Will and Marjory continued on these terms, seeing each other once or twice a week without any word of love between them; and for all that time I believe that Will was nearly as happy as a man can be. He rather stinted himself the pleasure of seeing her; and he would often walk half-way over to the parsonage, and then back again, as if to whet his appetite. (p. 194)

The advantageous neutrality of Will's position, however, proves disadvantageous when his attempts to defer the closure of his desire are met by Marjory's refusal to remain a surrogate object of his desire. While she is 'quite close' and unpossessed, Marjory remains a focus for the postponement of Will's unattainable mythical goals. But when, in the first instance, she tells her father that 'we should do better to leave Mr. Will's house for the present' (p. 191), 'Will was put entirely out of countenance' (p. 192), having committed himself to a condition of desiring which, with the removal of Marjory, brings to bear on itself its indigenous

lack. Will's response to this is a kind of neurosis whereby he begins to read in Marjory the same kind of neutrality that he read, as a youth, in the plain and the sea, investing her with both apocalyptic and, now, demonic alternatives, which emerge as equally attractive to Will. It is apparent, again, that Will's desire is directed at root by unintelligible motives so that, when the non-existent mythical targets are revealed as such, it begins to assume its essentially Arboreal character:

> He thought he recognised a fine, perverse angel in that still soul which he had never hitherto suspected; and though he saw it was an influence that would fit but ill with his own life of artificial calm, he could not keep himself from ardently desiring to possess it. Like a man who has lived among shadows and now meets the sun, he was both pained and delighted. (p. 192)

When 'Marjory played him a sad trick by suddenly marrying somebody else' (p. 194), Will's unpossessed object of desire is removed outright and his notion of postponement is shown, like the mythopoeic formula, to be unworkable within the context of his literal experience. However, it is only after this that Will begins to accept certain realities pertaining to Marjory which, finally, overwhelm his imagined mythical projection of her. Alerted by his bitterness, he now sees Marjory as we have seen her - as the Marjory of marital conspiracies and material greed who 'plainly knew little of her own mind, and, in spite of a deceptive manner, was as fickle and flighty as the rest of them' (p. 194). If a little crass, this assessment of Marjory is accurate in that Will, for the first time, sees her for what she is, not the undecidable (un)eventuality of his apocalyptic desires, but an ordinary woman with ambitions tending towards the domestic security of the common fold.

Will, to begin with, is 'reasonably displeased' by Marjory's elopement, 'moped a good deal for a month or two, and fell away in flesh, to the astonishment of

his serving-lads' (p. 194). But while, on a personal level, Will is forced to contend with the removal, once and for all, of his surrogate object of desire, on an archetypal level, Marjory's elopement represents the critical dislocation of the marriage motif from the core of the story and, with it, the erasure of its function as a ritual re-enactment of apocalyptic renewal. 'The Parson's Marjory' serves as yet another example of Stevenson's extrusion of archetypes from the interior of his narrative. But it also shows us that romance, more generally, can only indicate the Logos inadequately through a range of metaphorical substitutions; or, alternatively, that it can only, like Will, incorporate the postponement, rather than the revelation, of the transcendental significations which it is meant to signify. Rather than adhere to the archetypal order of conventions, 'The Parson's Daughter' has denied that order and, in doing so, has revealed the absence which exists within and around it. It is an absence which, in Will, can no longer be postponed and, as we shall see, necessitates his retreat into a condition of neutrality that not only pre-exists the structural apparatus of romance. Unable to satisfy or sustain his desire, Will's untenable mythical urgencies finally give way to an Arboreal yearning for a condition of neutrality that pre-exists desire itself. And it is with this in mind that we approach the final section of the tale, 'Death'.

'Death'

Will o' the Mill is a narrative whose forward movement (remembering Fielding's remarks on *The Master of Ballantrae*) is accompanied by a backward one. This

backward movement, as suggested, pertains mostly to Will's regression into an Arboreal condition that pre-exists desire, more of which will be said in due course. But it also pertains to the narrative structure, its content and setting. The section 'Death' begins with an elliptical description of the passing of time as it has occurred in the anticlimactic aftermath of Will's liaisons with Marjory. In doing so, it makes an important distinction between the former locus of Will's aspirations, the plain, and the habitat within which he remains a constant feature, the falling valley. This distinction is not only important for what it says of Will's final withdrawal. It is the decisive juxtapositioning of contingent settings which, having previously occupied a collateral teleology (through the environmental metaphor of all things tending in one direction), have become polarised into unconnected scenes of urban chaos and rural degeneration. Of the cities it is said:

> Year after year went away into nothing, with great explosions and outcries in the cities on the plain; red revolt springing up and being suppressed in blood, battle swaying hither and thither, patient astronomers in observatory towers picking out and christening new stars, plays being performed in lighted theatres, people being carried into hospitals on stretchers, and all the usual turmoil and agitation of men's lives in crowded centres. (p. 195)

Put at a distance from Will, the cities retain a libidinal urgency. They each represent, however, a self-contained libidinal flux that precipitates violence, rather than renewal, with each perpetuating an aimless, disposable cultural and political activity that, in the passing years, 'went away into nothing'. The 'crowded centres' of the cities, moreover, seem inversely proportionate to the cities as we had seen them connected by the umbilical bond of the river. There is not one but many centres, each confined to its own frenetic space. No longer parts of a collateral teleology, these

cities seem to incorporate the revolutionary turmoil of nineteenth-century continental Europe, emphasising the collapse of the *ancien regime* and the ascendancy of a modern epoch of urban life. We appear, then, to be reaching a part of the core of the work in which we discover, not an archetypal correlation, but a historical and cultural realisation of civic depravity and unrest, of a kind that was contemporaneous with Stevenson and which he would later explore in *Jekyll and Hyde*.

In contrast, the falling valley is placed outside of any historical or cultural context. It occupies instead a kind of vacuum of presence, representing a different kind of dysteleology: it is timeless, remote, almost absent, having no direction within or outside of itself, a wilderness, only, of Arboreal motions:

> Up in Will's valley only the wind and seasons made an epoch; the fish hung in the swift stream, the birds circled overhead, the pine-tops rustled underneath the stars, the tall hills stood over all; and Will went to and fro, minding his wayside inn, until the snow began to thicken on his head. (p.195)

If the cities represent the dysteleological passage of desire through time, the falling valley, in its detachment from the urban centres, is immersed in a kind of dysteleological ambience that pre-exists the mobility of desire. In this sense, Will (appearing as an extension of his environment) is put at a pre-libidinal distance from the meaningless, libidinal discord of the plain.

Prior to desire, nothing is desirable - not even life. Thus, for Will, the natural consequence of a state of undesiring is a virtual death. When offered the chance of journeying into the plain, Will responds:

> You come too late... I am a dead man now: I have lived and died already. Fifty years ago you would have brought my heart into my mouth; and

> now you do not even tempt me. But that is the object of long living, that man should cease to care about life. (p. 196)

The paradoxical manipulation of logical criteria - being dead whilst living, living long so as to cease to care about life - signals the regression of the narrative upon an Arboreal singularity which is conclusively revealed when Will's virtual death becomes an actual one.

In his actual death, Will, like the soldiers marching to their death at the beginning of the story, enters a vanishing point of narrative. Unlike the soldiers, Will's departure is prolonged, not sudden, partly described, rather than undescribed; and, in fact, describes a phase of Will's experience which, strictly speaking, cannot be described. Similarly, Will's transition from virtual to actual death is anti-climactic, painless and unspectacular - anything but an apotheosis or exaltation of heroic deeds. It begins with phantasmagoric recollections of past and present acquaintances and scenes, where the real and the unreal, the literal and the imaginary, become no longer distinguishable as separate categories of Will's experience:

> The dead themselves were with him, not merely taking part in this thin show of memory that defiled before his brain, but revisiting his bodily senses as they do in profound and vivid dreams.... But about the middle of the night he was startled by the voice of the dead miller calling to him out of the house as he used to do on the arrival of custom. The hallucination was so perfect that Will sprang from his seat and stood listening for the summons to be repeated; and as he listened he became conscious of another noise besides the brawling of the river and the ringing in his feverish ears. It was like the stir of the horses and the creaking of harness, as though a carriage with an impatient team had been brought up upon the road before the courtyard gate. (p. 196 - 197)

As with Will, the narrative itself is impacting upon an emergent singularity, no longer sure of the validity of that which it describes, no longer capable, in being channelled entirely through Will's point of view, of giving us omniscient, elliptical summaries. As a summary of events, the text, as it were, has become only partly visible, having been infiltrated by invisible aspects of narrative - by ghosts, dreams, hallucinations; and there is a sense in which, as the story comes to an end, it is undergoing a transition from visible to invisible status. Structurally, meanwhile, the text becomes a material embodiment of the untranslatable phase of narration it attempts to convey so that, on reaching the interior of the work, there is no anagogical correspondence between the text and the referential anchorage of the Logos, but only the perforating absence of any logical foundation.

The present \ absent combinations of characters and scenes culminate in the arrival of a gentleman traveller, Death, who is presented in terms which are wholly undecidable: '...[Will] tried in vain to turn the light into his face; either he handled the lamp clumsily, or there was a dimness over his eyes; but he could make out little more than a shadow at table with him' (p. 199). Significantly, Stevenson resists a transcendental or transfigurative death in that, as Death tells Will, 'I am a natural law... and people call me Death'(p. 201). In *Will o' the Mill*, the archetype of death as an apotheosis is superseded by the Arboreal priority of death as a law of nature - not an apocalyptic crescendo, but a biological eventuality, a consequence of entropy in the existing life form. And yet, it is by passing 'backwards' through the unintelligible phase of death that Will's desire, having been denied its journey in life, re-emerges as a journey into afterlife.

Will o' the Mill began with the prospect of a journey and, in this sense, seemed certain to follow the conventions of romance. As we have seen, however, the journey-motif has been invoked if only to be invalidated within the context of Will's narratable experience. Having impacted upon the Arboreal singularity of death, the prospect of the journey presents itself for a second time: 'God knows I am tired enough of it all; and when the times comes for a longer journey than ever you dream of, I reckon I shall find myself prepared'. Death's response is final: 'The time has come!' (p. 200). But if a journey is imminent, it is immanent through death, and can only be made 'intelligible' within the context of an invisible textuality, outside of Will's narratable (or 'conscious') experience. Will's desire, in other words, can only be expressed and met, and an Arboreal vitality issued and received, outside the material frontiers of language, beyond the constraints of a visible structure which cannot contain or convey its 'illogical tendencies'. Hence, the journey begins where the narrative ends: '... when the world rose the next morning, sure enough Will o' the Mill had gone at last upon his travels' (p. 201). The fact that the journey begins where the narrative ends emphasises the pre-structurality of *Will o' the Mill*: it is a narrative that cannot accommodate the Arboreal impulse which occasioned its formation and, in attempting to do so, can only describe the fact that it must close prior to describing what it seeks to describe.

A Summary

The distinction between Frye's interpretation of the journey motif and Stevenson's 'adaptation' of it is a telling point of departure between Frye's summary of conventional romance and Stevenson's development of romance as a modern idiom. By way of summarising *Will o' the Mill*, then, it would be useful to refer to an essay by Frye which deals specifically with the journey motif in order to demonstrate the full extent of *Will o' the Mill's* inversion of conventional structure.

Frye's interpretation of the quest motif is founded, not unreasonably, on the principle of the journey as metaphor, which is as much as to say that the quest is capable of symbolic, allegorical, mythical or anagogic expansion in ways already described. The journey as metaphor is not so much a matter open to authorial choice as a matter of course, a hermeneutic necessity. Frye dedicates an entire essay to the subject, called, appropriately enough, 'The Journey as Metaphor', in which he summarises the concept of the journey as a metaphor for life:

> *Journey* is a word connected with *jour* and *journee* [French words for "day"], and metaphorical journeys, deriving as they mostly do from slower methods of getting around, usually have at their core the conception of the day's journey, the amount of space we can cover under the cycle of the sun. By a very easy extension we get the day's journey as a further, perhaps more concentrated, metaphor for the whole of life, life being thought of as a cyclical process of birth, death, and renewed life.[8]

In literary structure, the metaphor of the journey finds its most amplified expression in romance, says Frye, although he is quick to indicate the position of romance as a secondary extension of myth:

> A journey is a movement from here to there, from point A to point B, and as a metaphor for life the two points are obviously birth and death. But this is true only of the individual: the containing way or direction is cyclical. When the cyclical movement enters the individual life, we have the form of journey we call the quest, where a hero goes out to

> accomplish something, kill a dragon, deliver a heroine from a giant, help destroy a hostile city, or what not. The hero of the quest first of all goes "away": that is, there must be some direction for his movement. Home, as Eliot says, is where one starts from. If the quest is successful, he normally returns home, like a baseball player, the great model for this returning journey being of course the *Odyssey* ... The genuine quest-cycle is of the type in which the conclusion is the starting point renewed and transformed by the quest itself.[9]

Whether or not we agree with Frye's interpretation, it is difficult to imagine the journey / quest motif as anything less than potentially metaphorical, difficult, that is, to reflect on any given example that is autonomous in the absolute sense of being narratorially exclusive, confined to literality or restricted to some kind of private level of signification. Within any given narrative, the quest transcends its local circumstance and becomes imbued with symbolic resonances which exceed the limitations of its literal environment. Metaphorically expanded, it forms a structural and semantic totality across an abundance of narratives which are otherwise historically, culturally and materially distinct.

Or so it would seem. With *Will o' the Mill*, however, the journey is not a metaphor for life, but an undisclosed and inaccessible 'metaphor' for death. Principally - and this is the crux of the matter - *Will* is a narrative that invokes the journey motif as an ulterior effect of its visible duration, as something which is generated but which remains outside of the text and which makes itself unavailable to any interpretative or hermeneutic procedure. Consequently, *Will o' the Mill* deactivates the structural and semantic integrity of the journey as metaphor. It is a text which, by employing some of the principles and positions expressed by Stevenson in his theoretical essays, effects the disassociation of *Will* from any archetypal correlation and, this way, reduces the metaphorical potential of the

journey to a private level of signification. Without a visible journey-structure, there is no way of configuring *Will's* attachment to a secondary stage of communication, no way of validating the metaphorical correspondences between it and other texts. It is the absence of the journey as a narratable event that, finally and dramatically, reduces *Will o' the Mill* from organic totality to inorganic separation.

Situating the journey as an ulterior effect, Stevenson has comprehensively extrapolated the archetypal interior of his narrative and positioned it on the *outside* of his text. The extra-positioning of archetypes as signatory headings is paralleled by the extra-positioning of archetypes from within the story's structural 'core' itself. Previously, we drew attention to the fact that, while *Will o' the Mill* appeared structurally coherent on the outside, it remained to be seen whether it was structurally coherent on the inside. Clearly, it is not. In the first instance, there has been no durational teleology, involving the disclosure of archetypal stages via the quest. There has been no spatial teleology, culminating in the climactic moment of vision, triumph or marriage. The anticipated archetypes are envisaged but, ultimately, evaporated, as the narrative continually retreats into a pre-structural singularity that precedes and exceeds its event as a conventional structure. It can be said of *Will o' the Mill* that, in removing the mythopoeic formula from the context of romance, it has paved the way for the Arboreal transformation of romance. It has theorised and made possible those anomalies which we have explored in *Jekyll and Hyde* and *The Master*, creating the conditions that allow for romance as a modern idiom.

On one level, then, that of the elimination of the mythopoeic formula, *Will o' the Mill* works as a metaphor for the failure of metaphor, showing how the archetype

of 'renewed life' cannot be accessed through the inadequate means of a visible structure. Just as the 'renewed life' cannot be experienced within the context of life, so it cannot be literalised within the context of narrative. In illustrating this, *Will* has caused some confusion among its recipients, having been accepted for publication, Roger Swearingem explains, 'with reservations about the story's indeterminate hovering between realism and allegory'.[10] What is regarded, rather sheepishly, as 'realism' by the publishers is really the refusal of *Will* to enter into the structural determinations of the traditional romance and to admit, instead, an indeterminacy which, far from being some kind of unresolved flaw, is rather a 'description' of the metaphorical vacuum at the core of allegory. It is, precisely, an indeterminacy arising from an extrusion of conventional elements which are always placed at an unconquerable distance from the thought of the Logos they are meant to represent; and, finally, it is an indeterminacy that enables Stevenson to describe the inversion of *Will* upon a point of singularity that enables, in turn, the unintelligible fruition of the Arboreal impulse - not its admission and recovery as a visible or narratable presence, but its admission and recovery as an ulterior effect of narrative.

Notes

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[1] *Will*, written in 1877, appears in the *Cornhill* magazine in 1878. *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped, Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Master of Ballantrae* and *The Ebb-Tide* were written and published in 1881 - 82, 1885 - 86, 1885 - 86, 1888 - 89 and 1893 - 94, respectively.

[2] It is true that Stevenson, writing in the late nineteenth-century, cannot be said to have provided us with an 'authentic' fable - one that has been transmitted and received orally, and latterly inscribed by some keen antiquarian. In this sense, Stevenson's 'counterfeit' fable might betray certain features attributable to a principle of displacement, certain complexities, or 'excessively' descriptive or discursive tendencies. This, however, should not provide any obstacles if we are sure that, even if its archetypal functions have been to some extent 'disguised', we nevertheless know them to exist. Nowhere does Frye state that a fable written in the nineteenth-century should be any less authentic than a fable received from archaic sources: indeed, one should suppose that questions of authenticity need not apply, seeing as all fictions move to and from the same archetypal referents. Frye himself

makes the point that more primitive kinds of stories do not necessarily chronologically precede the more sophisticated varieties. More primitive stories, he remarks, come 'into existence whenever literature adopts "primitive" conventions, which it does every so often throughout its history. Such primitive periods usually begin with what is called "decadence," a moralized term of which the structural meaning is an exhaustion of possibilities in a previous development' (*SS*, p. 70). For Frye, the end of the nineteenth century, often referred to as *the* Decadence, represents one such period of collapse and regeneration; and this, needless to say, is the period within which Stevenson is situated.

[3] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousands Faces* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 30.

[4] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousands Faces*, p. 30.

[5] In their respective order, these are the opening lines of 'The One-Handed Girl', 'A Lost Paradise' and 'The Heart of the Monkey' from *The Lylac Faery Book*, and the 'The Wonderful Birch' from *The Red Faery Book*.

[6] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousands Faces*, p. 164.

[7] In pages 203 - 206 of the *Anatomy*, Frye lists examples of 'the moment of epiphany', ranging from the 'several mountain-top epiphanies of the Bible' to Yeats' *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* (*AC*, p. 204).

[8] Northrop Frye, 'The Journey as Metaphor', *Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays, 1974 - 1988* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), p. 212.

[9] Frye, 'The Journey as Metaphor', p. 213.

[10] Roger Swearingem, *The Prose Works of Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p. 28.

Chapter Six

The 'Mobile Nature at Our Feet': *The Ebb-Tide*

Written at the end of Stevenson's career, *The Ebb-Tide* seems as far away generically, as well as chronologically, from *Will o' the Mill* as we could get. If *Will* presents itself as a fable or folk tale, lying nearer a mythical fundament which it progressively rejects, *The Ebb-Tide* 'displaces' any such mythical relations, replacing them with a mimetic rigour that immediately distances the story from any mythopoeic site of origins. Like *Will*, the opening sentence of *The Ebb-Tide* appears as a declaration of generic intent; though, this time, the mythical overtones of *Will* are supplanted by factual data that range from the geographic to the social to the biological: 'Throughout the island world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease' (p. 173). The definite location in time and space, contemporaneous with Stevenson's own lifetime, presents an absolute contrast to the timeless pastoral exuberance of *Will*. And while the latter begins by asserting a teleological agenda which it continually refutes, *The Ebb-Tide* appears to do the opposite in asserting a fragmentary world of islands, men and diseases which, in being focused on 'the tiny pagan city' (p.173) of Papeete, is at once disassociated from any western metaphysical context. Similarly, in being clustered around 'the disorder of merchandise', it is a world of dysteleological squalor empowered by the dynamic of colonialism which, far from expressing any mythical values, is empowered, in turn, by commercial exploitation and material greed, the excesses of

which are bound to produce a surplus of vagrants such as 'the three most miserable English-speaking creatures in the whole of Tahiti' (p. 174), Herrick, Davis and Huish.

Having said this, *The Ebb-Tide* reverses the initial premise of dysteleological squalor by incorporating the teleological orientations of the quest scenario and, to this extent, corresponds to the structure of romance in a way that *Will* does not. The contrast, then, is a strange one: where *Will* evokes a mythopoeic structure, it never engages one; while *The Ebb-Tide*, which appears far from mythopoeic, does. However, if *The Ebb-Tide* stands opposite *Will o' the Mill* by visibly admitting the quest structure, its development of that structure as a mythical analogue is one that renders it, not only unsustainable, but ideologically unsound.

In her introduction to the *The Ebb-Tide*, Jenni Calder characterises the story as an exploration of 'what happens when men are deprived of a moral framework'.[1] The consequences of this are an attempt by 'the trio' to deliver themselves from their economic and social depravity which, in Herrick's case, is accompanied by an attempt to restore to his life a moral framework through which he is able to acquire his moral salvation. *Will o' the Mill*, we recall, took us further away from any such model. In *The Ebb-Tide*, Stevenson reverses the process and confronts the possibility of allowing a narrative to form around the recovery of a structural model of apocalyptic renewal. But it is, precisely, through this manoeuvre that Stevenson rather tests the efficacy of the redemptive quest by placing it within the context of a corrupt colonial underworld where the manifestation of apocalyptic values proves an impossible requirement of the story's literal contingencies. In *Will*, the trans-historical structure of romance is placed at an unconquerable distance from the

actuality of Will's experience and superseded by an Arboreal singularity. In *The Ebb-Tide*, the trans-historical structure of romance is restricted to a level of historical and cultural locality within which the mythical associations of structure, and their inherent moral values, cannot be actualised or literalised, but only revealed as damaging illusions, not least in the sense that they can be used to legitimise the activities of a ruthless imperialist like Attwater.

In *The Ebb-Tide*, meanwhile, Stevenson resists the allure of the Arboreal impulse as we have seen it in *The Master* and *Jekyll and Hyde*. Instead, it is theorised on the basis of preceding and superseding the antithetical standards of morality, law and religion particular to a Victorian ethos, where the revelation of the primitive interior of civilised man is *not* in itself destructive. It is charged, rather, with the Arboreal vitality of preserving life for life's sake, regardless of the moral consequences; which means that, in Herrick's case, it is the illusory moral framework which he aspires to that, when imposed against his basic drives, proves destructive. Jenni Calder observes, accurately, that 'Herrick, and to a lesser extent Captain Davis, retain some degree of moral sensibility, although self-preservation dominates'.[2] I wish to go further by suggesting that self-preservation not only dominates but, eventually, obliterates Herrick's moral sensibilities; and to such an extent that he is able to acquire the 'redemption' he craves - though under terms which are Darwinian rather than mythical.

The Trio

There is, in the section heading 'The Trio', something of a mythical irony respecting the unholy trinity of Herrick, Davis and Huish to whom it refers. And this is indicative of the tone of the occasional mythical references in *The Ebb-Tide*: they are not to be taken as symbolic abstractions of the universe of archetypes, but as allusions only which are devoid of any metaphorical content. These allusions are arbitrary, pertaining less to a transliteral bond of archetypes than to a private level of signification contained within the narrative's historical and cultural scope. The Virgilian chorus so often relied upon by Herrick in his moments of despair no longer refers to the ancient creeds of lost civilisations, but to the imperial heartland of modern England and the Etonian splendours of Herrick's youth:

> ...visions of England at least would throng upon the exile's memory: the busy schoolroom, the green playing-fields, holidays at home, and the perennial roar of London, and the fireside, and the white head of his father. For it is the destiny of those grave, restrained, and classic writers, with whom we make enforced and often painful acquaintanceship at school, to pass into the blood and become native to the memory; so that a phrase of Virgil speaks not so much of Mantua or Augustus, but of English places and the student's own irrevocable youth. (pp 174-175)

The dislocation of the significative values of myth in *The Ebb-Tide* is paralleled by a dislocation of values in general - by deceptions, lies, masquerades, humiliations, fantasies, all of which are compounded or made necessary by the poverty, illness and starvation of the protagonists. Each of the trio have been 'shamed into the adoption of an alias' (p. 174). In being linguistically unaccountable they are also ontologically so, having adopted signs without the efficacy of the presences they refer to: 'they knew next to nothing of each other, not even their true names' (p. 174). The act of writing is devalued by the letters they write to their families back home, the values of which are negligible anyway because they remain unsent. But to write them, at least,

is considered by Davis as a matter of sound moral policy: 'it may be hard to write, and to write lies at that; and God knows it is; but it's the square thing... and if you don't I'll tell you what I think it is - I think it's about the high-water mark of being a brute beast' (p. 189). That Herrick's refusal to prevaricate bogus reassurances is construed by Davis as a species of depravity is indicative of the extent to which the moral efforts of the characters have become detached from any fixed standard. Davis' outrage at the gross exaggerations of Huish's letter stresses the point. ' "That's what you did with the paper that I went and begged for you?" he roared' - as if to imply that there a certain standards to be observed within the boundaries of their dishonesty where, in a relative sense, one mode of lying is more honest than another.

The referential status of *The Ebb-Tide* is as volatile as the world it describes, with neither the mythical evocations of Virgil nor the moral pretensions of the protagonists having any absolute value.[3] In *The Ebb-Tide*, such values are unfixed and purely relative, or else devoid of meaning altogether. They are regularly displaced and reasserted according to the expediencies with which the 'three sops of humanity' (p. 183) are faced, not least by Herrick who, in being a man 'of kindly virtues' (p. 174), is desperate to maintain a fixed standard of self-worth - though the attempt proves unsustainable in view of his emergent needs. When Davis performs an impromptu jig in begging for breakfast, 'Herrick looked on heavy-eyed, hunger for that moment conquering all sense of shame...' (p. 185). In the throes of hunger, all sense of morality is deposed. It is only after Herrick has eaten that he is able to remonstrate with himself as regards the unacceptable lows to which he has stooped: ' "I can't beg!" he screamed, and again threw himself prone' (p. 188). As Calder points out: 'Herrick still relates himself to Victorian England and his respectable

background', an environment from which 'he cannot liberate himself'.[4] He retains, in other words, a moral framework appropriate to England but unworkable within the context, as Nicholas Rankin calls it, of 'the rough edge of Empire'.[5]

While *The Ebb-Tide* explores what happens to men when they are without a moral framework, it also reminds us that such a framework can only be sustained under favourable conditions of economic and social stability. In *The Ebb-Tide*, morality issues, not from any metaphysical source, but from the individual in relation to his material assets. (Attwater, we notice, is able to maintain a puritanical standard of religious devotion, a fact not inconsistent with his command of the pearl industry). Herrick, of course, has no material resources upon which he can rely and is compelled to inhabit a moral vacuum. He is forced to confront the absence of values pertaining, not only to his material situation, but to himself. In the letter intended for his sweetheart, he asks: 'I have always unceasingly loved, but what's my love worth? And what was I worth?'(p. 190). Herrick's sense of worthlessness is the catalyst for his suicide which, under the standards he has retained, becomes the only 'moral' option open to him. But there is a sense in which, from the surge of vanity felt in writing his mock Virgilian epitaph, Herrick has recovered something of worth in recognising that 'it was the bare sense of his existence prompted him; the sense of his life, the one thing wonderful, to which he scare clung with a finger' (p. 194). Brought to its minimal point, the bare sense of existence is morally void, possessing a value which precludes the moral arguments of whether or not he should prolong his life. As such, Herrick discovers an underlying desire for existence as the only 'value' upon which his existence rests. At this stage, however, it is a discovery that cannot be

reconciled with his insistence on retaining a moral value-system which is incompatible with his needs.

The tension between an assertion of moral values and the bare sense of existence that precedes them is extended throughout the story's structure which, on assuming the form of the redemptive quest, begins from a position of Arboreal priority that prohibits its mythopoeic expansion. It is a structure, moreover, already infected with the arbitrariness of the values it relies on. The quest itself - initiated under circumstances of economic and, ultimately, biological necessity - is dependent on an act of colonial transgression. Values, again, are manipulated to suit the circumstances at hand as Davis side-steps the dubieties of their action with arguments concerning the welfare of his wife and kids: 'What matter laws, and God, and that? My folks are hard up, I belong to them. I'll get them bread or, by God! I'll get them wealth if I have to burn down London for it' (p. 199). Herrick, meanwhile, complies after accepting the possibility of returning home with his dignity intact, having initially felt that 'We could never do that' (p. 200). Davis's rejoinder is compelling: ' "*We* could," said the other. "Captain Brown couldn't, nor Mr Hay, that shipped mate with him couldn't. But what's that got to do with Captain Davis or Mr Herrick, you galoot?" '(p. 200). The opportunity of restoring his individual worth (by restoring his name) is irresistible to Herrick, in spite of the fact that it can only be achieved at the expense of committing a robbery which had appalled him to the point of preferring 'a few strokes in the lagoon - and rest' (p. 199). Before it has started, the redemptive quest is reliant on an act of deception, and the desire for salvation upon a theft, with Davis insisting that, if they 'sell that liquor off at the pier-head,

and the schooner after that' (p. 198), Herrick will 'go home (as like as not) a millionaire' (p. 200).

The beginning of the quest, through a sudden proliferation of symbolic innuendoes, augurs badly. The *Farallone*, 'flaunting the plague-flag as she rolled', is a 'forbidden ship' (p. 202), still smitten by 'the effects of the dead men' (p. 203). Performing the same function in *The Ebb-Tide* as the tangent metaphors in *Will o' the Mill*, *The Farallone* is a symbolic exterior of the internal frailties of the crew who will sail her; though it is true that, having obtained the *Farallone*, Herrick, Davis and Huish have been mythically upgraded from the inglorious status of 'three sops of humanity' to the glorious one of 'co-adventurers' (p. 203). The status, however, is a false one, and is seen as such almost immediately. Herrick is so unnerved by the prospect of addressing the crew for the first time that 'he racked his brain, and overhauled his reminiscences of sea romances for some appropriate words' (p. 205). Herrick is a fraud and the adventure, already, a sham, a fact born out by his response to the captain's command of 'Mr Hay, we'll up anchor, if you please': ' "For heaven's sake, tell me some of the words," ' whispered Herrick' (p. 200). Without the legitimate linguistic resources, Herrick is unable to facilitate his role as an adventurous seaman and, to this extent, is epistemologically estranged from the archetypal designations of the mythical quest. The journey notwithstanding, Herrick begins from a position of pre-structurality which precludes his entry into the mythopoeic formula.

Far from inhabiting a conventional model, *The Ebb-Tide* continues to emerge from a welter of falsehoods and deceptions. For Herrick, the matter is brought to a head when, presented with a spread of delicious foods, he is forced to consider with

compunction the terms by which they have undertaken their journey. Accordingly, the food becomes a test of his moral resolve against the Arboreal priority that underlies it:

> It was impossible after these months of hopeless want to smell the rough, high-spiced sea victuals without lust, and his mouth watered with desire of the champagne. It was no less impossible... not to perceive, with sudden bluntness, the gulf where he had fallen. He was a thief among thieves. He said it to himself. He could not touch the soup. If he had moved at all, it must have been to leave the table, throw himself overboard, and drown - an honest man. (pp. 209 - 210)

In the end, it is a futile resistance to 'the bare sense of his existence' which precedes his moral reasoning, the value of which he rejoices in with repeated exclamations, we notice, concerning its 'worth':

> 'It's too late to hesitate,' he thought; his hand took the mug instinctively; he drank, with unquenchable pleasure and desire of more; drained the vessel dry, and set it down with sparkling eyes.
> 'There is something in life after all!' he cried. 'I had forgot what it was like. Yes, even this is worth while. Wine, food, dry cloths - why, they're worth dying for, worth hanging for! Captain tell me one thing,: why aren't all the poor folk foot-pads? ' (p. 210)

Paradoxically, however, the acquisition of food and material comforts enables Herrick to reconstruct a moral framework (and, with it, a sense of guilt proportionate to his present course of action) of a kind that was impossible to sustain under the constraints of basic needs. As he admits to Davis: 'Another week and I'd have murdered some one for a dollar. God! And I know that? And I'm still living?' (p. 210). And, to this extent, Herrick has arrived at a moral impasse. By partaking of ill-gotten gains and growing in strength, Herrick is able to assert values which are grounded, precisely, in the acquisition of ill-gotten gains. It is the clearest insight yet

into that which Herrick refuses to acknowledge - that, in *The Ebb-Tide*, morality has no transcendental or metaphysical value, but only an illusory one which is completely relative to biological and material conditions. Herrick, instead, continues to judge himself according to a logic of morality that requires his death or condemnation, having now become fully complicit in the transgressive action of stealing a boat and its valuable cargo. Any prospect of renewal, he knows, has been denied in advance, though it is a prospect which he continues (with some success) to project upon his situation. But if a mythopoeic formula is allowed to form, it must always be from a position of having already been invalidated, so that Herrick's reassertion of moral values, as we shall see, can only intensify, rather than resolve, his moral impasse.

Having reached this impasse, Herrick determines to sacrifice his moral for his economic salvation, seeing nothing for it but 'to carry through this business if it might be carried; pluck profit out of shame, since shame at least was now inevitable...'(p. 213). But, as if to compensate for his moral losses, Herrick's determination to see the business through is quickly superseded by the more virtuous aim of recovering Emma, his former lover: 'all stirred him to the roots of his manhood. "I *will* win her,' he thought, and ground his teeth. 'Fair or foul, what matters if I win her?" ' (p. 214). The resolution is an impressive one, although, in Emma, he has assigned himself an object of attainment which he has already failed to attain. Through his friendship with the Kanakas, however, Herrick acquires a refuge from his moral impasse and, through their influence and good will, the moral stamina to pursue his resolution: 'The fact that he was held in grateful favour by these innocents served like blinders to his conscience, and there were times when he was

inclined, with Sally Day, to call himself a good man' (p. 218). A fuller entry into the conventions of the redemptive quest now seems possible, whereby Herrick, though painfully conscious of his own guilt and alarmed at 'the doom that seemed to brood upon the schooner', has nevertheless acquired a sense of purpose and resourcefulness that, because unproven, might best be described as quasi-heroic:

> He who had proved his incapacity in so many fields, being now falsely placed amid duties which he did not understand, without help, and it might be said without countenance, had hitherto surpassed expectation; and even the shameful misconduct and shocking disclosures of that night seemed but to nerve and strengthen him. (p. 220)

With this, Stevenson has formed the crux of a conventional structure, according to which Herrick, though aware of his illegitimacy, is able to invest in the world, and to a lesser extent in himself, a range of conventional values. He has asserted an object of renewal in the figure of his former sweetheart, Emma; he has enlisted the help of the agents of good in the form of the Kanakas; and he has been forced to contend with Davis and Huish as the obstacles set against him in his attempt to re-enter the world from which he has fallen. There is even a sense in which Herrick is able to assume the role of a redeemer figure capable, in the case of Davis, of converting the forces of evil to those of good: 'Herrick, if you see me put a glass to my lips again till we're ashore, I give you leave to put a bullet through me; I beg you to it!' (p. 224).

If a design-formation has been asserted by Herrick, then it is bound to be unstable, given that the values he has assigned to it, in coming from him, are as illegitimate as he is. Herrick's awareness of this means that the teleological orientations of the quest remain firmly planted in the dysteleological fluctuations of

his conscience. As much is revealed when he is called upon to respond to the approaching squall. Rather than compelling him to act as becomes the hero of a 'sea romance', the squall compels him to a state of suicidal inaction: 'The greatness of the peril and his own alarm sufficed to silence him. Pride, wrath, and shame raged without issue in his mind; and he shut his teeth and folded his arms close' (p. 221). Pride, wrath and shame contend for Herrick's character so that, having consolidated the forces of 'good' around himself, the captain and the Kanakas, he proves unable to consolidate the discrepancies within himself. His outburst against Huish - 'I hope I shall die very soon; but I have not the least objection to killing you before I go (p. 233) - attests not only to his wrath, but to the prevalence of his shame which, via the hope 'to die very soon', attests, in turn, to his despair of himself as a worthless fraud. As such, his redemptive powers are always already infected at root, albeit the effect of his shame perversely sustains him and, because it makes him careless of life, gives him the courage to act wrathfully, as his confrontation with Huish proves. That his shame sustains his moral courage at the same time as undermining it emphasises the paradox upon which the structure of the quest in *The Ebb-Tide* is founded, where the formulation of a dialectical structure becomes, as it were, 'an impossible requirement'. There can be no distribution of archetypal values while Herrick perseveres in accomplishing the crime upon which he has embarked; and, especially so, where he is quick to reprimand Captain Davis, not only for his debauchery, but for 'stealing my profits and drinking my champagne that I gave my honour for?' (p. 224).

The complexities of Herrick's tortuous moral exertions, his Existential stupors, his suicidal bouts, are the ingredients of a remarkable character and a far

more alluring portrait of disrupted personality than, as Calder suggests, 'the straightforward duality'[6] of *Jekyll and Hyde*. It is remarkable too, in view of this, that Herrick succeeds in restoring order where disorder has reigned. He has almost succeeded, even, in realigning the disorientated aims of their journey with the structural aims of the conventional romance. The order, however, is fleeting and eradicable, and the projection of conventional values an illusion which cannot be sustained in a world of colonial racketeering.

If the teleological aims of the quest have been reasserted, they simultaneously descend into randomness following the discovery of the non-existent cargo of champagne. In *The Ebb-Tide*, deception emerges from deception, so much so that the 'quest' has been founded, not on the deception of the main characters, but on one which has preceded theirs'. With the discovery of the bogus champagne comes the realisation that 'Wiseman and Wishart were to be paid for casting away this old schooner and its cargo' (p. 229) as accessories to an insurance fraud. One deception quickly gives way to another as Davis realigns the aims of their quest through the idea of taking up the insurance scam from where their predecessors left off: 'Down goes the *Farallone*, and good-bye to her!... the Consul packs us home, at Uncle Sam's expense, to 'Frisco; and if that merchant don't put the dollars down, you come to me!' (p. 230). This secondary realignment, however, has been pre-emptively thwarted by Davis's debauchery and subsequent failure to 'keep the run of the stores' (p. 231). Again suspended, the journey has become an indeterminate flux. Supposedly bound for Sydney, the outcasts selected Peru instead. When Peru is negated, they aim for 'Frisco via Samoa. Samoa is out of the question because of the inadequate supplies, which means that 'Frisco', the ultimate terminus, is also

excluded. This way, the projected aims of the quest are progressively cancelled and, finally, rendered aimless by the invulnerable obstacle set against it - not demonic evil, but necessity. Under the constraints of the need for self-preservation, the journey they have undertaken will not coincide with the conventional aims of renewal which they have ascribed to it. And while it is their belief, upon the fortuitous discovery of Attwater's island, that they may 'fill up with fish, and coconuts, and native stuff, and carry out the Samoa scheme hand over fist' (p. 235), it is rather the case that this, too, is a deception. When a destination emerges, it is a highly uncertain one and one which, from its uncertified status in Findlay's directory, is epistemologically unaccountable:

> *New Island.* According to M. Delille this island, which from private interests would remain unknown, lies, it is said, in lat. 12° 49' 10'' S., long. 133° 6' W. In addition to the position above given, Commander Matthews, H. M. S. *Scorpion*, states that an island exists in lat. 12° o' S., long. 133° 16' W. This must be the same, if such an island exists, which is very doubtful, and totally disbelieved by South Sea traders. (p. 235)

Impacting on Attwater's island, the 'quest' becomes one of unintelligible consequence. And, while the suggestion abounds of an available boon in the prospect of pearls, it is also the case that this is a 'pearling island the government don't know about' (p. 245). This island appears as a transgressor's paradise where no laws, no standards need apply: it lies outside the constraints of Herrick's England. And, yet, through the figure of Attwater the tension between traditional values and the bare sense of existence is finally brought to a head, with varying results for each of the characters - none of which conform to the mythopoeic formula.

'Attwater's island', says Vennessa Smith, 'is a place replete with poetic possibilities... and metaphoric abundance'.[7] On reaching it, Herrick seems to have discovered an apocalyptic solace from his present dilemma. As he approaches the shore, 'a sense of the eternal weighed on his mind' (p. 236). The impression is furthered by the mythical imagery of the arrival of dawn where 'the hollow of heaven was filled with daylight' (p. 236); and, likewise, by the almost religious awe with which Herrick regards the scene: 'The isle - the undiscovered, the scarce-believed in - now lay before them and close aboard; and Herrick thought that never in his dreams had he beheld anything more strange and delicate' (p. 236). Touched by an apocalyptic reverence for the island, Herrick seems to have transcended his world of biological and material dependencies:

> Herrick stood transported. In the gratified lust of his eye he forgot the past and the present; forgot that he was menaced by a prison on the one hand and starvation on the other; forgot that he was come to an island, desperately foraging, clutching at expedients. (p. 238)

Appearing to Herrick as an 'exotic paradise', Jenni Calder observes, the island is 'full of all the tempting ingredients of a restorative, unspoilt escape'.[8] But Herrick is deceived and his impressions founded on illusory mythical values, which are revealed as such when 'suddenly the curtain was raised' and they 'beheld, with an astonishment beyond words, the roofs of men' (p. 239). The feeling of having transcended the world of his delinquency is removed from Herrick by symbolic indications both of his homeland, through the 'flagstaff at the pier-head' on which 'the red ensign of England was displayed', and its moral institutions, through the

'building with a belfry' which 'might be thought to mark it out for a chapel' (p. 239). It appears, then, that the island presents, not the opposite of England, but England in miniature, and that the standards implicating Herrick's delinquency have been zealously preserved here.

This, however, is another deception. For it is rather the case that the standards of Herrick's England, and especially those of religious significance, have been appropriated by men like Attwater in order to serve the distorted aims of the imperial conquest. The values thus derived from a western metaphysical context are seen to be relatively associated with the unethical transactions of a 'real, first-rate, copper-bottomed aristocrat' (p. 246). Not so much referring to a mythical site of origins, they are limited to a historical and cultural locality, sustained only as illusions by Attwater as a means through which he is able to exploit the natives, to the overall effect of extorting a 'moderate fortune' (p. 259). And where Herrick as yet retains a precarious faith in the possibility of mythical redemption (as his initial response to the island suggests), his meeting with Attwater compels him, as we shall see, to admit the bogus nature both of the values he aspires to and the mythical means of redemption he craves.

Attwater is close to admitting his appropriation of Christian values when explaining to Herrick that '...I have had a business, and a colony, and a mission of my own. I was a man of the world before I was a Christian; I'm a man of the world still, and I made my mission pay' (p. 253). Attwater's rhetoric is such that the aims of religion and imperialism (or myth and materialism) cannot be separated. His religious beliefs, whether or not they are delivered in earnest, cannot be regarded, in practice, as anything other than devices employed for the accumulation of wealth.

And, while they give to Attwater an aura of apocalyptic wrath, it is impossible to qualify his mythical status when it is immured in the literal activities of what Davis has accurately described as 'this racket of Mr Attwater's' (p. 246). Indeed, in his ambiguous remark to Herrick, that 'I am a plain and very literal man' (p. 259), Attwater seems to emphasise that he is nothing more or less than his literal appearance suggests. Not so much as a 'dark apostle' (p. 256), it is through his possession of firearms, his size and his aptitude for armed combat that he has been able to exert his invulnerable superiority.[9]

The inconsistencies of Attwater's character - his 'uncompromising pursuit of his own interests', his 'religious zeal' (p. 252) - have an immensely confusing effect on Herrick: 'Attwater intrigued, puzzled, dazzled, enchanted and revolted him' (p.256). By the end of their 'Better Acquaintance', however, his confusion gives way to more stupefying mortal dread, whereby he begins to liken Attwater to a symbolic embodiment of apocalyptic retribution:

> The object of his terror had become suddenly inverted; till then he had seen Attwater trussed and gagged, a help less victim, and had longed to run in and save him; he saw him now tower up mysterious and menacing, the angel of the Lord's wrath, armed with knowledge and threatening judgement. (p. 260)

Herrick's fear is aroused in equal measure with his guilt, upon which Attwater has the profoundest effect, not only by invoking but by seeming to personify 'the grace of your Maker and Redeemer' (p. 251). To this extent, Attwater appears to offer Herrick a redemptive outlet from his moral impasse and even goes so far as to offer it outright. Interestingly, however, Herrick refuses:

> [Attwater] spread out his arms like a crucifix; his face shone with the brightness of a seraph's; in his voice, as it rose to the last word, the tears seemed ready.
>
> Herrick made a vigorous call upon himself. 'Attwater,' he said, 'you push me beyond bearing. What am I to do? I do not believe. It is living truth to you; to me, upon my conscience, only folk-lore. I do not believe there is any form of words under heaven by which I can lift the burthen from my shoulders...'
>
> ...The rapture was gone from Attwater's countenance; the dark apostle had disappeared; and in his place there stood an easy, sneering gentlemen, who took of his hat and bowed. It was pertly done, and the blood burned in Herrick's face.

Attwater's sudden change of manner from ecstasy to irony seems to convey the accomplishments of an actor and is perhaps the clearest evidence yet of his phoney religious exterior. If at present oblivious to this, Herrick has nevertheless began to show signs of apprehending the fallacy of apocalyptic renewal: in spite of Attwater's supplications, he labels religion a species of folk-lore; his resistance to the Christian ideal of repentance is final. It is, however, through his realisation of Attwater's abuse of the religious tenets he aspires to which enable Herrick, in the end, to recognise the illusory quality, not only of Attwater's mythical pretensions, but those of his own. In the event, Herrick's teleological aspirations are reduced to an acceptance of the dysteleological literality of life, where the desire for apocalyptic renewal is revealed as an expendable extension of the most fundamental biological drives.

Attwater's faith and alleged fatalism have given him the grounds upon which to act with impunity in administering 'justice' on the island. On the colonial fringes, the institutionalised laws of England no longer apply. Attwater, then, in yet another realignment of values, has become a law unto himself. For Herrick, however, Attwater's account of killing one of the natives for having broken the 'laws' of the island amounts to murder. Having broached the laws of religion, under the pretext of

applying his own, Attwater, as far as Herrick is concerned, has exposed himself for what he is - a fraud: ' "It was a murder!" he screamed, "a cold-hearted, bloody-minded murder! You monstrous being! Murderer and hypocrite - murderer and hypocrite - murderer and hypocrite -" ' (p. 268). In the aftermath of his outburst, Herrick no longer sees Attwater in his metaphorical capacity as the angel of the Lord's wrath, but rather sees him in his plain and literal aspect as a 'sinister man' or 'that man there with the cat' (p. 270). Recognising also, as regards their sinister plot, that Attwater 'sees through all' (p. 270 - 271), Herrick is adamant that 'there's nothing for it, there's nothing to be done: all gone; life, honour, love' (p. 271). This, for Herrick, appears to be the end of his bitter exploit. He has gone as far as he can go in his attempts to fashion from depravity an available means of renewal; and, such is his despair, that he is moved to renounce life altogether: 'Oh my God, my God, why was I born?' (p. 271).

However, having elected suicide as the only satisfactory means of redemption, Herrick finds that the life he wishes he never had has too great a value in itself to be relinquished under the constraints of however great a moral burden. In attempting to drown himself, he experiences an epiphanic contact, not with a world from which he has fallen, but with the world of which he is an integral part - the natural world. It is a world within which the illusory values he has aspired to are preceded and superseded by an aboriginal vitality which renders those values, finally, invalid:

> The shock of the immersion brightened his mind immediately. The events of that ignoble day passed before him in frieze of pictures, and he thanked 'whatever Gods there be' for that open door of suicide. In such a little while he would be done with it, the random business at an end, the prodigal son come home.... Why should he delay? Here, where he was

> now, let him drop the curtain, let him seek the ineffable refuge, let him lie down with all races and generations of men in the house of sleep. It was easy to say, easy to do. To stop swimming: there was no mystery in that, if he could do it. And he could not. He knew it instantly. He was aware of an opposition in his members, unanimous and invincible, clinging to life with a single and fixed resolve, finger by finger, sinew by sinew; something that was at once he and not he - at once within and without him.... To any man there may come at times a consciousness that their blows, through all the articulations of his body, the wind of a spirit, not wholly his; that carries him whither he would not. It came now to Herrick, with the authority of a revelation. There was no escape possible. The open door was closed in his recreant face. He must go back into the world and amongst men without illusion. (p. 276 - 277)

The passage featuring Herrick's abortive suicide, in fact, is remarkable for the way in which it illustrates his transition from an acceptance to a rejection of metaphysical values - for the way, that is, that Herrick's redemptive efforts are quickly overcome by biological responses which are not, he senses, his own, but those, as it were, of a 'man who is all men' emerging from his Arboreal interior. This way, Herrick has discovered that which Stevenson is seeking to re-discover through romance - a diffused Arboreal urgency received from an 'innumerable army' of ancestral othernesses. On the one hand, then, he has aroused an Arboreal preconsciousness that reveals to him the internal absence of himself. But, on the other, he has made contact with an aboriginal vitality which, in the end, rejuvenates and makes him fit for life. It is noticeable too that Herrick's repudiation of the mythical universe has occurred at a point where, in attempting to drown himself, he returns, not to the apocalyptic world from which he has fallen, but to the primordial world from which his species has emerged - 'the empire of molluscs', as Gillian Beer has written, where, 'instead of the garden at the beginning, there was the sea and the swamp'.[10] The title of the tale, meanwhile, refers to the inward motion of the sea upon itself, which is reflected in Herrick as one who has 'complied with the ebb-tide of man's affairs' (p. 257).

Herrick has undergone his own inward motion upon himself or, rather, upon 'the form of some remote progenitor, irrecoverable because precedent to history or anterior to consciousness'.[11] But Herrick *has* recovered his remote progenitor - not in itself, but in its latent manifestation as a part of himself 'not wholly his'. Going further than the characters we have examined in the other texts, Herrick reaches through the Arboreal interior into an aquatic one, one which precludes the organisation of desire into oppositional values and perpetuates, only, a desire to live.

Herrick's 'epiphany' corresponds to the climactic archetypal scenario given previously by Frye as the 'symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature come into alignment...' (*AC*, p. 203). But Herrick's epiphany is not apocalyptic; it is purely biological. Far from securing an alignment between two worlds, it brings to bear on the one the absence of the other. The world of myth and metaphor is revealed, not as an idea in itself, but as an effort at one which, under the constraints of biological necessity, is instantly dissolved. It is with an 'incredible simplicity of submission to ascertained fact' (p. 277) that Herrick accepts his biological rank and re-enters the world of men without illusion, the emphasis on 'fact' (both here and below) suggesting that he has finally acceded to a world of literal actuality. The myth of apocalyptic renewal, personified in the figure of Christ, can no longer serve as anything more than the localised trope of his ignominious capitulation to 'the bare sense of his existence':

> With the fairy tale of suicide, of a refuge always open to him, he had hitherto beguiled and supported himself in the trials of life; and behold! That also was only a fairy tale, that also was folk-lore. With the consequences of his acts he saw himself implacably confronted for the duration of life: stretched upon a cross, and nailed there with the iron

> bolts of his own cowardice. He had no tears; he told himself no stories. His disgust with himself was so complete, that even the process of apologetic mythology had ceased. He was like a man cast down from a pillar, and every bone broken. He lay there, and admitted the facts, and did not attempt to rise.

In the introduction to this chapter, it was said that *The Ebb-Tide* incorporates the teleological orientations of the quest scenario and that, by visibly admitting the quest, it confronts the possibility of allowing a narrative to form around the recovery of a mythopoeic model. Herrick's 'epiphany', in fact, carries the quest structure, which has consistently deflected away from available goals, to its climactic verge - if only to expose it as unworkable within the context of his literal experience.

In spite of his initial torment and, indeed, through having 'nothing left that I believe in' (p. 279), Herrick's revelation becomes a kind of liberation and, even, renewal in the sense, firstly, that he is able to renounce his moral obligations to Davis and Huish, which are liable, after all, to result in his destruction. Having emerged from among layers of deception, Herrick's repudiation of mythical values coincides with a rejection of those values as appropriate solutions for his predicament. Where once, between himself, Davis and Huish, 'there was an implied bond of loyalty in their cohabitation of the ship and their past miseries; to which Herrick must be a little true or wholly dishonoured' (p. 257), there now exists, in Herrick, an indifferent submission to the stronger party, Attwater, coupled with a willingness to assist him in thwarting the diabolical schemes of his former comrades. It is an act through which Herrick is assured of his survival, in spite of 'my living horror of myself '(p. 279); but it is only after the death of Huish and, especially, the 'redemption' of Davis, that Herrick's sense of Arboreal renewal becomes more positively conveyed.

It is through Herrick's contrast with Davis, in fact, that we learn to appreciate the consequences of the mythopoeic structure as personally reductive, false and damaging. If Herrick eventually recognises the illusion of myth, Davis comes to parody the acceptance of it. He is excessively superstitious - 'Superstition rules all men; semi-ignorant and gross natures, like that of Davis, it rules utterly' (p. 291) - and, in being so, goes the opposite way of Herrick: instead of apprehending the fallacy of mythical values, he adopts them obsessively. The signs are ominous when, on contemplating his expulsion from the island, Davis relies on mythical sources in attempting to explain his present misfortunes:

> There came over Davis, from deep down in the roots of his being, or at least from far back among his memories of childhood and innocence, a wave of superstition. This run of ill-luck was something beyond natural; the chances of the game were in themselves more various; it seemed as if the devil must serve the pieces. The devil? He heard again the clear note of Attwater's bell ringing abroad into the night, and dying away. How if God...? (p. 282)

Huish's malicious proposal 'to see that man and chuck this vitriol in his eyes' (p. 290) has an even greater effect on him. Though adamant about Attwater that 'I want to see him dead' (p. 284), Davis nevertheless insists upon maintaining a standard relative to their predicament, declaring, 'No! It can't be! It's too much; it's damnation. God would never forgive it'(p. 290). His resolve, however, is gradually weakened by the belief that, in Huish, 'He had raised the devil, he thought' (p. 287). At the same time, the prospect of accomplishing riches through vile deeds is afforded a measure of justification by Davis's ultimate objective of providing for his wife and kids: 'The stakes were so high - the pearls on the one hand - starvation and shame on the other. Ten years of pearls! The imagination of Davis translated them into a new,

glorified existence for himself and his family' (p. 288). Davis has been brought to his own moral impasse. Unlike Herrick, however, he concedes to the illusion of the mythical universe and, in accepting Huish's proposal as the only workable course of action, prepares to meet his doom accordingly:

> For murder he had been prepared; but this horror of the medicine in the bottle went beyond him, and he seemed to himself to be parting the last strands that united him and God. The boat carried him on to reprobation, to damnation; and he suffered himself to be carried passively consenting, silently bidding farewell to his better self and his hopes. (p. 291)

If Herrick has stepped outside of an illusory moral framework, Davis has become immeshed in it. And, having been spared his life in the botched encounter with Attwater, he abandons himself to the mythical universe once and for all: 'With trembling hands he seized hold of the man whom he had come to slay; and his voice broke from him like that of a child among the nightmares of fever: ' "O! Isn't there no mercy? O! What must I do to be saved?" ' (p. 298).

Davis is, as Attwater points out, 'the true penitent' (p. 298), a man suspended among illusions who becomes not only corrupted but isolated by them. In the end scene, Herrick is free to leave; Davis, however, is compelled to remain: '...you mayn't just see the way that I view it in, but I'd most rather stay here upon this island. I found peace here, peace in believing' (p. 300 - 301). In relation to this closing scene, Jenni Calder has remarked:

> In choosing to remain with Attwater, Davis has rediscovered a structure, but it implies a morality that is destructive to the individual. It demands his complete subservience, it takes him out of the real world of choice and conflict and challenge, the *real* world, and it involves the renunciation of his wife and children.[12]

To this we might add that the structure Davis has rediscovered is a mythopoeic one - a structure which, in being incompatible with the literal expediencies of life, has diverted him from his Arboreal role as a provider for his wife and kids. Where once Davis was capable of adjusting values relatively to given situations, he has now committed himself to a rigid formula of apocalyptic renewal. It is one through which he has not been liberated but existentially marooned. There is even a sense in which, by committing himself to 'fables', Davis has found an excuse through which he can renounce - without compunction - his moral obligations towards his family. The structure he has entered, which the story has approached and invalidated, proves the most effective deception of all: for Davis, it is not penitence, but a moral evasion.

While Davis, as Jenni Calder suggests, 'trades life for belief', Herrick, in contrast, 'chooses life' and has learnt to accept life on its own terms so that, as Calder goes on, if 'the story ends on so tentative a note there is at least a hint of affirmation'.[13] This may seem a strange thing to say, given the fact that Herrick has suffered utter humiliation in being unable to die and by submitting himself to Attwater. However, if on the one hand he is 'only a puppy dog with a broken leg' (p.279), it is noticeable on the other that, in his 'failure' to commit suicide, there 'was a courage in this which he could not appreciate; the ignobility of his cowardice wholly occupying him' (p. 277 - 278). Herrick's cowardice is felt through an inability to confront the moral consequences of his actions, which dictate that he should die for his sins. By refusing to accept these consequences, however, Herrick has demonstrated a courage both in opting for life (and the liberation that life affords) and in rejecting, once and for all, the moral framework which necessarily entailed his self-destruction. That an affirmation is achieved through this choice is

clearly stressed in the story's 'tail-piece', where Herrick, after succumbing throughout the tale to an insufferable mixture of pride, wrath and shame, suddenly reveals a capacity for humour. There are symbolic indications of this in the ritualistic burning of the *Farallone*, an event which signifies his emergence from his moral torpor into a state of some relief. As Herrick sets the *Farallone* alight, the 'flames broke forth' and 'burned gaily' (p. 299), as if to reflect his own rekindled mood. But it is on hearing Davis that his capacity for humour is more directly expressed:

> ...measuring the progress of the flames, he found himself embayed to the northward of the point of palms, and here became aware at the same time of the figure of Davis immersed in his devotions. An exclamation, part of annoyance, part of amusement, broke from him... It was not impossible for him to overhear the suppliant's petitions, which he listened to some while in a very mingle mood of humour and pity... (p. 300)

Interestingly, Herrick's good humour is accompanied by other emotions of an oppositional cast, which seems to suggest that, in life, there are no determined states, but only a general vitality of irresolvable or indeterminate responses to given situations. The same is suggested, more broadly, by the linguistic closure of the story which, as Alan Sandison has said, 'is abrupt, almost perfunctory...'.[14] While Davis is left suspended among illusions, Herrick has accepted life on its own terms: its courses are uncertain and as undesigned as anything we know about his future at the close of the narrative. To this extent, he has reached a point that precedes the structuralisation of life into antithetical systems which, under life's conditions, are unnatural to it. For Herrick, life has superseded the illusion of order so that he comes, in the end, to affirm the underlying lack of structure that has prevented his attempts to raise one.

The ending, then, as Herrick prepares to evacuate the island, is as much a beginning, reflecting 'perpetual variation',[15] 'the physical world as endless onward process', the position 'of human beings as slight elements within unstoppable motion and transformation'.[16] It becomes, in this sense, a material embodiment of that which it describes - the return to a pre-structural condition - in Herrick's case, a realisation of 'the aboriginal within us' which cannot be traced through linguistic means. Instead of entering the unintelligible singularity of death, like Will, he enters the unintelligible singularity of life - and, for him, life is the vanishing point of narrative, something that cannot be structured narratorially because it exists prior to the orientations of structure. The fact that the narrative closes so abruptly serves as a truer reflection of what it has asserted - not the finite resolution of an organised plot, but the 'mobile nature at our feet' which, Stevenson has said, 'the arts, like arithmetic and geometry, turn away their eyes from...' (HR, pp. 172 - 173).

A Summary

From the ending, it becomes possible to view *The Ebb-Tide* in its entirety as an illustration of the demise of the conventional mechanisms of romance under the emergence of a Darwinian mobility, where the narrative has been, 'as it were, self-propelled, unfolding according to laws of nature with no initiating intention and no ultimate objective...'.[17] The same, Vennessa Smith implies, has been conveyed through the fact that 'the cargo of champagne aboard the *Farallone* initially represents bounty to the three beachcombers. These bottles, however, contain wine

turned to water...'. The reduction of bounty to common essentials, of wine to water (itself a reversal of the Christian myth), signifies the metaphorical reduction of *The Ebb-Tide* to a world of literal sensations, apparent in 'the sign of absence, water, the featurelessness of which is verified by each of their senses'.[18] It is water-imagery in *The Ebb-Tide* that emphasises its underlying Darwinian tenor - not only through Herrick's return to the primordial depths but, more subtly, through the story's incidental descriptions. When the '*Farallone* gave one of the aimless and nameless movements which (even in an anchored ship and even in the most profound calm) remind one of the mobility of fluids' (p. 289), we are reminded, in turn, of those Darwinian 'motifs' identified by Gillian Beer - of 'forms in a flux' or a 'consciousness of the fluent', or of the realisation of 'so absent a beginning and so bleak and prodigious an extension of time...'.[19] The sea underlies the *Farallone's* journey in time, 'unstoppable motion' the active pursuit of fixed goals. 'In one hour's time,' says Herrick, 'the waters would have closed over the stolen ship' (p. 300). Yet, having began her journey from 'well out in the jaws of the pass' (p. 202), the *Farallone* has always been destined for being consumed, just as the narrative must be consumed by the timeless mobility that underlies its own duration.

If 'Darwin's theory thrust the human into nature',[20] a narrative like *The Ebb-Tide*, having dislocated itself from its mythopoeic origins, reflects this. It is not a story that signals, ritualistically, the triumph of man over nature, nor the demonic triumph of nature over man, but the position of man as an integral part of nature. It is a narrative that is 'describing a new place for man in nature' and, because of this, is 'disruptive of established social and moral categories'.[21] But, if it is disruptive, it is not so pessimistically, as Herrick's affirmation, underlined by humour, suggests.

Stevenson is remarkably undaunted by theories of evolution. Certainly, he plays on public fears of 'the ape-theory' and 'degeneration', but differs immensely from those authors of the *fin de siècle* with whom he is sometimes, erroneously, associated. For Oscar Wilde, for example, the idea of the human subject as a composite form of countless othernesses is a matter of grave consequence:

> By revealing to us the absolute mechanism of all action... the scientific principle of Heredity... has shown us that we are never less free to act than when we try to act. It has hemmed us round with the nets of the hunter, and written upon the wall the prophecy of our doom. We may not watch it, for it is within us. We may not see it, save in a mirror that mirrors the soul. It is Nemesis without her mask. It is the last of the Fates, and the most terrible.[22]

Stevenson, however, glories in the prospect of the new science and uses it to legitimise the function of romance. Romance could act as a means of restoring to modern life those inherited experiences which are not so much removed from modern life as they are a living part of it. The possibility of an Arboreal foundation could help define romance as something more than mere escapism. Romance could become part of a project of discovery, a way through which to establish an emotive contact with primitive bases in a way that science could not. Romance could become a means of theorising 'the charm and terror of things',[23] those areas of interest off-limits to empirical reasoning. It could add to the evolutionary theory the substance it lacked by exploring the sensational and emotional territory of human life, whereas science could only concern itself with inscribing the facts:

> Science writes of the world as if with the cold finger of a star-fish; it is all true; but what is it when compared to the reality it discourses? where hearts beat high in April, and death strikes, and hills totter in the earthquake, and a thrill in all noises for the ear, and romance herself has made her dwelling among men?[24]

For Stevenson, science was too detached from what it sought to explain to be able to encompass the full breadth of it, too much restricted by the rigours of objectivity. It had confined its matter to a textual world of epistemological categories, and was unable to contain or convey the experiential impact of what it described:

> A fact is not called a fact, but a piece of gossip, if it does not fall into one of your scholastic categories. An inquiry must be in some acknowledged direction, with a name to go by; or else you are not inquiring at all, only lounging... There is certainly some chill and arid knowledge to be found upon the summits of formal and laborious science; but it is all about you, and for the trouble of looking, that you will acquire the warm and palpitating facts of life.[25]

Science could not engage in 'the great Theorum of the Liveableness of Life',[26] but could only regard life lifelessly, as an object to be explored from the outside rather than inside. Romance could move inside the object, make the object its subject: it could immerse itself in the dysteleological fluency of life that science had implied but could not rationalise:

> There is an uncouth and outlandish strain throughout the web of the world, as from a vexatious planet in the house of life. Things are not congruous and wear strange disguises.... There are moments when the mind refuses to be satisfied with evolution, and demands a ruddier presentation from the sum of man's experience. Sometimes the mood is brought about...by the spirit of delight, and sometimes by the spirit of terror. At least, there will always be hours when we refuse to be put off by the feint of explanation, nicknamed science; and demand instead some palpitating image of our estate, that shall represent the troubled and uncertain element in which we dwell and satisfy reason by means of art.[27]

Admitting the dysteleological impetus of the aboriginal foundation, meanwhile, was certainly viewed by Stevenson as more conducive to romance than the semblance of order said to characterise its function. It gave him the grounds upon

which to realise his belief 'in a greater part of life as chance'[28] as a workable 'method' of fiction, bearing in mind that, for Stevenson, romance ought to convey a 'poetry of circumstance', the sense that '[N]ow we are conscious of a great command over our destiny; anon we are lifted up by circumstance, as by a breaking wave, and dashed we know not how into the future' (GR, p. 153). To this extent, Stevenson does through romance that which has been claimed by scholars as the object of realism. The old distinction summarised by George Levine - that 'romance implies an ordered, stable, almost static universe', while 'the novel implies a growing, changing, disordered one'[29] - is done away with by Stevenson. Not that it was his aim to replicate, merely, the natural laws that science had inferred: rather, it was to reactivate a psycho-dynamic priority that science had suggested but was unable to convey beyond the limitations of the inscribed 'fact'. Nevertheless, through his adaptation of Darwinian principles, Stevenson was able to close the ill-defined gap between realism and romance and, by playing out the tensions between them, to deliver fiction from arguments that impeded its growth.[30]

It is partly because of its generic uncertainty that *The Ebb-Tide* has caused a deal of confusion among Stevenson's critics, who have reacted unfavourably to a tale which, had it been written by Conrad, would probably have received a great deal of praise. Questions, above all, relating to the story's structure, to its ending and to its apparent 'failure' to satisfy the conventional expectations of romance,[31] have disconcerted both past and present reviewers.[32] These same reviewers, however, have rather demonstrated a failure on their own behalf to come to terms with a modern form of romance that refuses to inhabit, and in fact dissolves, any copybook formula. In struggling with *The Ebb-Tide*, it could be said that some critics, in the event of its

immediate publication, have proved more astute than they were aware of, showing a marked disapproval of certain 'weaknesses' in the narrative which, under the terms we have described it, can now be seen as strengths. As one unsigned reviewer remarked:

> All through the narrative there is a recurrent suggestion of the undeveloped.... The suggestion of the undeveloped is a radical weakness in the story, since it inevitably brings with it to the imaginative reader processes of development that must have raised the story to the first rank of fiction, yet are absolutely neglected. Brilliant as are the successive incidents of the narrative of the voyage that forms the first part, 'The Trio', there is something of sterility, when looked at collectively and retrospectively from the final scene of the story. They have not the air of inevitableness. They seem to have been designed independently of the end in view, and tend towards no tremendous culmination....[33]

Enamoured by his own conventional expectations of what *should* occur in the narrative, this reviewer does not recognise the accuracy of his remarks as descriptions of the effects that Stevenson was seeking to achieve. The same can be said of another reviewer who complained that *The Ebb-Tide* 'is badly constructed, a mere random series of adventures, sliced out of a chain of heterogeneous episodes that might have gone on forever'.[34] To this we might answer - precisely; while it becomes clear that Stevenson was creating effects for which his immediate auditors had no clear means of explanation, given that, as Sandison has said, *The Ebb-Tide* is Stevenson's 'most complicated book' which 'complicates things in a new way'.[35] If *The Ebb-Tide's* dislocation of the mythopoeic formula has sparked disapproval amongst most, there have been those, like Israel Zangwill, who saw that, in dispensing with conventions, Stevenson had in fact 'struck a blow for the literary artist's independence, for his freedom to choose his own subject irrespective of tradition and conventional expectations'; and that the story ought to be commended

for having rejected 'the parlour-game formula to which the stock British novel invariably reduces itself'.[36] Zangwill's recommendations point out that the alleged failures of *The Ebb-Tide* have been founded on a failure to appreciate, or to tolerate, what it is doing with conventional methods of storytelling. Notwithstanding this, critics may be forgiven for their scepticism in view of the fact that Stevenson himself, if on more positive grounds, was somewhat confused by the tale he had created. As he remarked in a letter to S. R. Crockett:

> *The Ebb Tide* ... is really a singular work. There are only four characters, and three of them are bandits – well, two of them are, and the third is their comrade and accomplice. It sounds cheering, doesn't it? Barratry, and drunkenness, and vitriol, and I cannot tell you all what, are the beams of the roof. And yet – I don't know – I sort of think there's something in it.[37]

Interestingly, Stevenson appears somewhat overawed by the singularity of his work, to such an extent that he, himself, can hardly be sure of what it stands for. This, however, goes some way to substantiating his essentially Arboreal claim - that romance is capable of producing effects for which we have no direct means of explanation, effects which cannot be accessed or interpreted through the epistemological means at our disposal; and not only in relation to fiction but, as the following conclusion will presently reveal, in relation to science also.

Notes

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[1] Jenni Calder in her introduction to *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Other Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), p. 20.
[2] Calder (ed.), *Jekyll and Hyde*, pp. 20 - 21.
[3] Some recent critics of explored the absence of linguistic or moral value in *The Ebb-Tide* to very useful effect. In *The Ebb-Tide*, says Alan Sandison in *Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, 'concrete definitions are so elusive' (p. 326). The text, he suggests, 'is effectively an assault upon the

capacity of any single genre or mode to represent or convey moral truth. In turn, this fracturing or fragmentation will imply fundamental doubts about there being any such truth to be conveyed' (p. 324). As regards the linguistic indeterminacy of *The Ebb-Tide*, Sandison points out: 'To such an extent do aliases proliferate that naming anything seems, paradoxically, to point to its essential unknowability or at least to its unrepresentability through language. For Attwater to call his island Zacynthos, to take one obvious example, is to make it less, not more "real"...' (p. 333). Vennessa Smith, meanwhile, explores the absence of value in terms of an absence of linguistic authority and meaning:

> Each of the trio takes up the threads of narrative without success, grasping and then surrendering the reins of authorship. Herrick's "incompetence" is indicated by his inability to assume control until the very conclusion of the story. The more resourceful plotting of Davis... meets its match in Attwater. He hands over authority to Huish, who formulates a desperate plan to destroy Attwater using a bottle of acid. The bottle is a significant image in *The Ebb-Tide*, emblematising the emptying out of meaning that accompanies the closure of speculation.... In the stories of castaways on desert islands, bottles assume significance as bearing final messages; ultimate authorial statements. Huish's last-resort bottle of acid, on the other hand, serves a horrific project of erasure, signalling the expiration of the beachcomber plot. Vennessa Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific: Nineteenth-century Textual Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 161 - 62.

Following on from Sandison and Smith, my point is that Stevenson does not expose an absence of value, authority or meaning purely for the sake of it: this is partly an exposition of the representational incapacities of narrative; partly an exposition of the indeterminacy of moral truth. But these, ultimately, are part of the process of admitting an Arboreal preconsciousness within the text, the implications of which will be considered later on.

[4] Calder (ed.), *Jekyll and Hyde*, p. 21.

[5] Rankin, *Dead Man's Chest*, p. 310.

[6] Calder (ed.), *Jekyll and* Hyde, p. 21.

[7] Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, p. 162.

[8] Calder (ed.), *Jekyll and Hyde*, p. 21.

[9] The initial description of Attwater emphasises the point:

> He was a huge fellow, six feet four in height, and of a build proportionately strong, but his sinews seemed to be dissolved in a listlessness that was more than languor. It was only the eye that corrected this impression; an eye of unusually mingled brilliancy and softness, sombre as coal and with lights that outshone the topaz; an eye of unimpaired health and virility; an eye that bid you beware of the man's devastating anger.... He was dressed in white drill, exquisitely made; his scarf and tie were of tender-coloured silks; on the thwart beside him there leaned a Winchester rifle. (p. 241)

It is interesting to note how much Stevenson's initial description of Attwater bears a resemblance to the initial description of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It is possible that, just as Conrad had *Treasure Island* in mind when writing *Romance*, he had *The Ebb-Tide* in mind when writing the more renowned novella. Kurtz, like Attwater, is notable for his size - 'He looked at least seven feet long'; while his power is secured, not through his apocalyptic mystique, but through his abundance of weaponry: 'Some of the pilgrims behind the stretcher carried his arms - two shotguns, a heavy rifle, and a light revolver-carbine - the thunder of that pitiful Jupiter'. The appearance of Kurtz as a 'pitiful Jupiter' corresponds noticeably with Attwater as a man possessed of a 'devastating anger'. Similarly, Attwater's 'listlessness' is exaggerated in Kurtz:

> His covering had fallen off and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arms waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze. (Kimbrough, ed., *Heart of Darkness*, p. 59)

Alan Sandison has remarked: 'By any standard, *The Ebb-Tide* is a distinctive and innovative work, so clear a precursor of Conrad's fiction that it is impossible to believe that he did not, in fact, make considerable use of it' (*Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, p. 318). The closeness of the descriptions outlined above would seem to substantiate Sandison's claim. Nicholas Rankin, meanwhile, points out another similarity between the two: 'Both men are solipsistic maniacs who

think their will is the force of destiny: ' " Oh, I can do anything ... You do not understand: what must be, must," 'says Attwater in *The Ebb-tide*. Likewise, ' "By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded," ' says Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*' (*Dead Man's Chest*, p. 312).

[10] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 127.

[11] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 128.

[12] Calder (ed.), *Jekyll and* Hyde, p. 22.

[13] Calder (ed.), *Jekyll and Hyde*, p. 22.

[14] Sandison, *Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, p. 319.

[15] Stevenson, 'Crabbed Age and Youth', p. 44.

[16] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 127.

[17] George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 18.

[18] Smith, *Literary Culture and the Pacific*, pp. 161 - 162.

[19] Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, pp. 127 - 128.

[20] Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, p. 1.

[21] Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, p. 14.

[22] Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in Morton, *The Vital Science*, p. 149.

[23] Stevenson, 'Pan's Pipes', p. 128.

[24] Stevenson, 'Pan's Pipes', p. 128.

[25] Stevenson, 'An Apology for Idlers', *Virginibus Puerisque*, pp. 54 -55.

[26] Stevenson, 'An Apology for Idlers', p. 58.

[27] Stevenson, 'Pan's Pipes', pp. 125 - 128.

[28] Kiely, *R. L. S. and the Adventure Tradition*, p. 24.

[29] Levine, *The Boundaries of Fiction*, p. 15.

[30] It is surely of some significance that, in looking to compare *The Ebb-Tide* with the work of other authors, Stevenson refers - not to Scott or Dumas - but to an author he detests: the French naturalist, Emile Zola. Writing to Henry James, Stevenson remarks:

> It seems as if literature were coming to a stand. I am sure it is with me; and I am sure everyone will say so when they have the privilege of reading *The Ebb Tide*. My dear man, the grimness of that story is not to be depicted in words.... Well, there is always one thing; it will serve as a touchstone. If the admirers of Zola admire him for his pertinent ugliness and pessimism, I think they should admire this; but if, as I have long suspected, they neither admire nor understand the man's art, and only wallow in his rancidness like a hound in offal, then they will certainly be disappointed in *The Ebb Tide*. Alas! Poor little tale, it is not *even* rancid. (Stevenson, *Letters, vol II*, p. 296)

Stevenson's ability to incorporate realist or naturalist subject-matter as a matter for romance has been noted by Malcolm Bradbury who summarises, for example, *Jekyll and Hyde* not only as 'a fable that touched some of the deeper moral anxieties of the age', but as a text which, in drawing attention to 'the man split between a respectable public self and a hidden, violent animal double', 'acknowledges the Naturalist concern with the animal in man, the *bête humaine...*'. Malcolm Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993), p. 46.

[31] As Alan Sandison has pointed out: 'What annoyed many of the literary critics of the day was the fact that Stevenson had broken with convention and – startlingly – dispensed with a hero altogether' (*Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, p. 319). However, one other outstanding complaint by critics tended to focus on the allegedly excessive violence of *The Ebb-Tide*. It is apparent that not only were there expectations regarding the genre of romance, but Stevenson also. J. A. Steuart reveals, and shares, the abhorrence with which the tale was received:

> ...the characters, as he remarked to Henry James, are "such a troop of swine," a description which his staunchest admirers reluctantly accept as accurate... It failed to please the big serial public, while discerning readers found in it ominous signs of degeneration. Why all this violence, they asked, this wallowing in the ugly and horrible? Had Stevenson ceased to be an artist, or did he care no more for wholesome, clean romance? J. A. Steuart, *R. L. S., Man and Writer* (1925), pp. 237-238

What critics like Steuart fail to appreciate is that 'violent' was exactly how Stevenson wanted it. As he wrote Marcel Schwob, using the original name for *The Ebb-Tide*, *The Pearl Fisher*: ' I have two huge novels on hand – *The Wrecker* and the *Pearl Fisher*... the latter, the *Pearl Fisher*, I think highly of,

for a black, ugly, trampling, violent story, full of strange scenes and striking characters' (Stevenson, *Letters, vol II*, p. 198).

The answer to Steuart's query, meanwhile, 'Why all this violence?' might be said to lie in Stevenson's own experiences of the South Seas during a tour in 1890. As Nicholas Rankin points out: 'They met all kinds of traders on this trip: men who were destitute, anaemic, ill, one with leprosy: men who had married natives, men who lived off natives, men who drank, and men who had murdered' (*Dead Man's Chest*, p. 310). Clearly, *The Ebb-Tide* was partly a response to what Stevenson himself had seen of a corrupt colonial underworld. Joseph Conrad was to do a similar thing in writing *Heart of Darkness*, a text which was in many ways a response to his Congo journey made, coincidentally, in 1890. As Edward Garnett informs us: 'Conrad's Congo experiences were the turning point in his mental life... The sinister voice of the Congo with its murmuring undertone of human fatuity, baseness and greed had swept away the generous illusions of his youth, and had left him gazing into the heart of an immense darkness.' The effect on his mental life being such, says Garnett, 'it may be said that Africa killed Conrad the sailor and strengthened Conrad the novelist'. Edward Garnett, *Letters From Conrad, 1895 - 1924*, in Daphne Erdinast-Vulcan, *Joseph Conrad and the Modern Temper* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 96.

[32] One recent commentator on the text, Peter Gilmour, seems to have missed the point altogether in looking, it appears, for an archetypal resolution to Herrick's predicament:

> What it means to be or to feel free, expressed in a move from a lower condition to a higher, never becomes part of Stevenson's world. The portrait of Herrick as a man knowing one form of humiliation after another... has been vivid, but nothing is made of his wish to change, to seek restitution, transcendence even. Perhaps Stevenson believed that such a wish was a delusion, but, if so, it can only be said that this is not shown either. Peter Gilmour, 'Robert Louis Stevenson: Forms of Evasion', in Andrew Noble (ed.), *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Vision Press, 1983), p. 199.

Gilmour's last remark is particularly baffling. The entire story has shown that the idea of restitution and transcendence is a delusion, spelling it out quite patently during Herrick's abortive suicide scene. Gilmour's disappointment, one can only assume, springs from the fact that *The Ebb-Tide* refuses to satisfy the aims of the mythopoeic formula and its narrative movement from a lower to a higher condition.

[33] Unsigned review, in Maixner (ed.), *The Critical Heritage*, p. 454.

[34] Unsigned review, in Maixner (ed.), *The Critical Heritage*, p. 461.

[35] Sandison, *Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism*, p. 317

[36] Israel Zangwill, in Maixner (ed.), *The Critical Heritage*, p. 460.

[37] Stevenson, *Letters, vol. II*, p. 288.

Conclusion

Ulterior Motives: 'The Language of Romance'

Having demonstrated the extent to which Stevenson detaches romance from its traditional bases, it is worth considering, by way of summarising all that has been said, further reasons as to why he felt impelled to do so. By the same token, it is necessary to consider the broader and more lasting implications of Stevenson's radical re-interpretation of the function of romance. On the one hand, as we have seen, Stevenson's development of a particularly modern form of romance was in many ways a response to concerns arising prior to and during his lifetime. We have tended to focus on a Darwinian influence in Stevenson's thinking. We might also be inclined to suggest, retrospectively, that Stevenson's reasoning of romance is not incompatible with a Nietzschean disqualification of truth as 'a mobile marching army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms,' and that his approach to fiction readily coincides with a Nietzschean polemic that 'truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are *illusions*'.[1] In Stevenson's case, the same degree of scepticism is applied to romance as a means of sustaining, through metaphors and metonymies, a teleological world-view that, through the illusory logic of linguistic structures, tends towards an absolute value or truth-foundation. We might also allude to Stevenson's work, as critics have noted, as a prelude to Freud's development of psychoanalysis as an independent field of study. As Malcolm Bradbury has said of *Jekyll and Hyde*: '...the book engaged with increasing scientific curiosity about the

unconscious self, the hidden "id", unspoken in an age of repression and strict morality, that Freud would soon explore'.[2]

It may be possible, in view of this, to situate Stevenson among those notable personalities who undertook an inauguration of new ideas which, in the twentieth century, have been expanded within the context of post-Modernism. Not acknowledged as such, the suggestion involves a certain amount of risk in that, if Stevenson is not acknowledged as such, then how can his influence be determined as significant? We might be tempted to say that, while he shows an adherence to certain innovations, he plays a subordinate role in their expansion overall. However, in this concluding chapter I wish to demonstrate two things: that it was indeed Stevenson's intention to initiate, through romance, new ideas about fiction; and that his influence on a post-Modern disavowal of traditional methods is more significant than we, within the context of Scottish or English literature at least, have tended to think.

In introducing the illogical predispositions of the Arboreal impulse, Stevenson could be accused of perversely indulging in the demonic alternatives described by Frye as the antithetical impediments of the apocalyptic order. But Stevenson, it should be stressed, in restricting the operations of narrative to genealogical levels, is introducing a version of the irrational or illogical that remains outside of, and demolishes, any metaphysical model. Irrational in this sense is not antithetically relative to the rationalisations of western logicians and metaphysicians like Frye, who regards the irrational as negative - as nightmare, evil and bondage, or as a characteristic feature of man in his fallen state prior to making a garden out of nature. Stevenson is fashioning an altogether different context, one that works outside of any rigid system of this or that positive or negative value. Nor is

Stevenson advocating disorder and the detachment from any stable foundation as something to be indulged in for its own sake. Stevenson, in fact, introduces the intriguing possibility that, because of its detachment from any rationalised conventional order, romance acquires a unique position among contingent forms of writing as a frontier discourse capable of producing the as yet unrealised 'discourse-formations' of the future idiom. The proposition is strange, but fascinating, and, more than anything, shows us that, as far as Stevenson was concerned, romance was far from being a form, merely, of irrational self-indulgence.

In 'Victor Hugos's Romances', Stevenson begins to theorise some of his paradoxical positions and simultaneities more sharply, while at the same time as expanding on them, to the point, in fact, that we find in this essay some of his most remarkable statements about the function of romance. Hinting again about romance as an activity that necessarily exceeds the rationalisations of structuralist method, Stevenson takes the matter further, as Glenda Norquay points out (with reference to Stevenson) in her introduction to *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*:

> Romance, he appears to argue, is a means of embodying ideas that cannot be formulated in analytical words: 'It is not that there is anything blurred or indefinite in the impression left with us, it is just because the impression is so very definite after its own kind, that we find it hard to fit exactly with the expressions of our philosophical speech'.[3]

The fact that romance is capable 'of embodying ideas that cannot be formulated in analytical words', has profound implications. It implies, in the first place, that Stevenson feels romance *is* capable of realising the irrational tendencies of the Arboreal impulse which, accordingly, cannot be expressed through any analytical or rational medium, and that romance *is* capable, after all, of acting outside the required

constraints of intelligible textuality. At the same time, and in yet another paradoxical twist, Stevenson insists that romance is by no means acting outwith our grasp; only, that it inhabits a space outwith the reach of conscious method. The intimation that romance by no means conveys a 'blurred and indefinite impression' but an impression 'so very definite after its own kind' seems to confirm the point; but it also begs the question as to what exactly Stevenson means by romance as something so very definite after its own kind.

What Stevenson is suggesting is the idea of a 'language of romance'[4] which is capable of creating its own, independent idiom. Having suggested the elimination of special categories of writing, Stevenson takes a revisionary twist in affording romance a special function: that is, as a phase of discourse which exceeds the rationalisations of the present idiom and, in doing so, begins to assert the formative processes of linguistic form and signification occurring beyond it. In this sense, romance, according to Stevenson, continually manufactures a condition of pre-structurality through which it begins to formulate the 'primordial' traces of an epistemological and conceptual ulteriority. Again, we notice, in the extract below, Stevenson's appeal to the irrational impulses of the subject as an originary means of structural production, the suggestion being that the rationalisations of the future idiom are ultimately dependant on the irrational accessions of romance. Beginning more broadly, with a general proposition on the relation of romance to philosophy and science, Stevenson explains:

> It is this change in the manner of regarding men and their actions first exhibited in romance, that has since renewed and vivified history. For art precedes philosophy and even science. People must have noticed things and interested themselves in them before they began to debate upon their causes or influence. And it is in this way that art is a pioneer of

> knowledge; those predilections of the artist he knows not why, those irrational acceptations and recognitions, reclaim, out of the world that we have not yet realised, ever another and another corner; and after the facts have been thus vividly brought before us and have had time to settle and arrange themselves in our minds, some day there will be found the man of science to stand up and give the explanation.[5]

Romance, then, does not elicit meanings from any symbolic resonance of archetypes which pre-exist its linguistic duration; it issues local and indeterminate meanings which are deferred through discursive phases and latterly conceived within the appropriate epistemological categories. Romance throws into strange relief those aspects of knowledge and experience which are as yet off-limits to conceptual verification, but which can latterly be assimilated through a process of signification and reified, thereafter, as epistemological givens.[6] Existing on the forefront of a linguistic assimilation of conceptual elements, romance is thus a point at which these elements are preconsciously encrypted. But more than this, Stevenson suggests, romance is capable of assimilating conceptual elements which are potentially out of reach of language altogether, and which have a tendency, instead, towards creating 'effects', rather than meanings, which, according to any analytical or rational diagnostic, are impossible to pin-down:

> The artistic result of a romance, what is left upon the memory by any really powerful and artistic novel, is something so complicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name upon it; and yet something as simple as nature. These two propositions may seem mutually destructive, but they are only so in appearance. The fact is that art is working far ahead of language as well as of science, realising for us, by all manner of suggestions and exaggerations, effects for which as yet we have no direct name; nay, for which we may never perhaps have a direct name, for the reason that these effects do not enter very largely into the necessities of life. Hence alone is that suspicion of vagueness that often hangs about the purpose of romance: it is not clear enough to us in thought; but we are not used to consider anything clear until we are able to formulate it in words, and analytical language has not been sufficiently shaped to that

> end... It is this idea which underlies and issues from a romance, this something which it is the function of that form of art to create...[7]

To see it this way, romance is the formulation of linguistic effects that come prior to language and which are inaccessible within their immediate field of operation. In effect, then, the language of romance is language in its Arboreal state: language prior to epistemology, realisation prior to rationalisation, subject / object prior to signification. And while, certainly, romance operates within an intelligible realm of textuality, at the same time, it is also capable of initiating an unintelligible textuality that may never acquire an intelligible status. Its tendency is to produce effects that are bound to an ulterior site of conceptual possibility so that, as far as any epistemological or interpretative rubric is concerned, romance is constructed out of absences of meaning that may or may not acquire 'presence' within an intelligible category.

If it is the function of romance to create 'effects for which as yet we have no direct name', then we have a complete reversal of Frye's premise that romance retains over time the conventions of form and maintains, as a consequence, the stability of a tradition. According to Stevenson, romance is the very opposite of a tradition: it is not so much grounded in an archetypal foundation as aspiring towards the unaccountable objects of its immediate design. It is not rooted in anything so solid as 'conventions' but, rather, locates and assembles itself outwith the range of any analytical or linguistic system that enables us to consolidate the idea of 'conventions'. In *Jekyll and Hyde*, *The Master of Ballantrae*, *Will o' the Mill* and *The Ebb-Tide*, we have seen how romance can acquire an effectiveness, not by reproducing conventional narrative strategies, but by reinventing itself according to

its capacity to supersede them. And it is perhaps the characteristic aspect of Stevenson's narratives that, rather than deconstructing by revealing absences and ruptures throughout the text, they are generating certain 'effects' that can be construed as absences only inasmuch as they cannot appear directly to any means of signification. Looking at his essays and fictions in total, in fact, Stevenson seems to be seeking to reify or make visible the ulteriority of language by allowing it to accumulate as an effect and, this way, is proposing, not a method of deconstruction, but a method of preconstruction. Romance, he tells us, works by asserting a preconstructive ambience or violation against the limits of enunciation and, this way, consolidates the primordial bases of the ulterior idiom, generating narratives without the guarantee of form and effects without the guarantee of meaning. With Stevenson, romance is not a process of ritual re-attainment, but of sustained creativity, not cyclically or teleologically determined but, by its method of pealing back the undisclosed eventualities of form, only perpetuates one possibility after another. It is not so much an abstract manifestation of some literary totality as a multiplicity of exceeded limits.

In stories like *Will o' the Mill* and *The Ebb-Tide*, the elimination of archetypes and the attempt to admit an Arboreal vitality can be seen as part of the effort towards creating effects for which we have had no direct name, but which perhaps, a century or so later, can be described according to the means available through the language of post-Modernism. That is to say that, as regards the singular instances occurring in Stevenson's fiction, we may have since devised an idiomatic range which is capable of rendering them into analytical clarity. Along these lines, Stevenson's speculations on romance are remarkably suggestive of some up-to-date

descriptions of what we nowadays call the 'post-Modern' condition. Jean-Francois Lyotard's assessment here, for example, could stand as a good summary of what has been intimated so far by Stevenson:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have to be done.[8]

In view of all this, we can begin to define Stevenson's role in the development of fiction more accurately. It has been noted by critics, as we have seen through Ian Duncan, that Northrop Frye's 'totality of fictions' has come to represent 'the view from a belated and ironic modernism that thinks it has nowhere to look but back, unless upward to an apocalyptic horizon'.[9] Stevenson has introduced an alternative perspective, closer to Duncan's, where romance, in constantly recreating and redefining itself, looks directly forward in its effort to breach the undisclosed eventualities of the future idiom. To modify Duncan's analysis of Scott in relation to Stevenson, it is possible to offer a conclusive context for Stevenson's romances. It is argued by Duncan that Scott's work, as a recreation of former modes, allows us to identify 'the condition of romance as modernity's vision of worlds it has superseded, charged with a magic of estrangement, peril and loss'.[10] Stevenson, coming after Scott, takes a similar position, albeit, with Stevenson, the position is reversed. Where

Scott establishes 'romance as modern culture's construction of a symbolic form prior to itself',[11] Stevenson establishes romance as modern culture's construction of a symbolic form ulterior to itself. Juxtaposed against Scott, Stevenson's theory of romance takes a hundred and eighty degree shift in focus, moving from prior forms to eventual forms, replacing a conception of what has been with the preconception of what will be. With Stevenson, the condition of romance becomes modernity's vision, not of worlds it has superseded, but of worlds that supersede it. Similarly, Duncan's summation of the position of romance at the beginning of the nineteenth-century may act as a firm basis for describing the alteration we see in romance, through Stevenson, by the end of the nineteenth-century: 'Once the prehistoric origin against which the novel redefined itself antithetically, romance may now be revived as a historical tradition - with which modern fiction is in turn to revive itself'.[12] In Stevenson's case, romance is revived as the deconstruction of a historical tradition and the preconstruction of ulterior forms through which modern fiction may continue to revive itself; but it will do so by invoking aspects of itself as yet to be revealed.

The idea of romance as a mode in which modern fiction, in the early nineteenth-century, revived itself can be reapplied in the sense that, arguably, it is through romance that fiction revives itself in the post-Modern epoch. It is possible to see this in the legacy of a writer like Stevenson who, following on from the Modernist period which saw his exclusion, proves to be an enormous influence on those writers emerging in the aftermath of Modernism. Robin Gilmour has summarised Stevenson's position perfectly:

> [Stevenson] points the way, not to the Modernists - who might have learned from him, but were put off by the romantic legend of R L S - but to a later generation of novelists living in the aftermath of the Victorian

> and Modern novel. Writers as different as Graham Greene and Jorge Louis Borges have found his narrative skill and formal self-consciousness, as well as his 'romance conferred on doubtful actions', liberating. If there is life after Joyce, Stevenson has an honoured place among those who have helped novelists find it.[13]

In his essay 'Borges and I', Borges, in assessing his foremost pleasures, proclaims: 'I like hourglasses, maps, eighteenth-century typography, the roots of words, the taste of coffee and the prose of Stevenson'.[14] It is a sentiment echoed by other prominent authors of the post-Modern period, including Vladimir Nabokov and Italo Calvino. Nabokov, as Nicholas Rankin observes, had a particular infatuation with *Jekyll and Hyde* which led him to declare it 'a masterpiece' that 'belongs to the same order of art as, for instance, *Madame Bovary* or *Dead Souls*'.[15] Italo Calvino, meanwhile, shows an alike regard, declaring that, 'Among the writers I have always read and, willy-nilly, have taken as a model is R. L. Stevenson'.[16] Given the extent of Stevenson's influence on these authors, it is strange to think that he has been mostly ignored and often disparaged in terms of his significance as a writer. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which Nabokov, Borges and Calvino, on the opposite side of Modernism to Stevenson, seem to be picking up the threads from where he left off. Calvino's story 'The Cloven Viscount', with its explicit adaptation of the *Jekyll and Hyde* 'motif', appears not only to demonstrate but to declare the point.[17] The 'magic realism', 'metafiction' or 'fabulation' perpetuated by Borges, meanwhile, does the same, with its tendency towards 'experiments with subject matter, form, style, temporal sequence, and fusions of the everyday, the fantastic, the mythical, and the nightmarish, in renderings that blur the traditional distinctions between what is serious or trivial, horrible or ludicrous, tragic or comic'.[18] It is a description that could stand as equally well for Stevenson's work. Clearly, these authors recognise

something in Stevenson which has went largely unrecognised among authors and critics in the main.[19]

The failure to recognise or to critically describe Stevenson's fiction can perhaps be attributed to the fact that he sought, precisely, to create effects for which we have had no direct name. His peculiarity being such, it would not be unfitting to suggest of Stevenson the same as Jacques Derrida has of Stephane Mallarmé. Mallarmé's own admiration for Stevenson gives weight to this claim which, because of the way we are conditioned to think about Stevenson, might otherwise seem off the mark:

> Is there a *place* for Mallarmé in a history of literature? Or, to begin with: does his text take place, take its place, in some over all picture of French Literature? We have been reading him for close to a century now: we are only beginning to glimpse that something has been contrived (by Mallarmé? in any case in terms of what passes *through* him, what traverses him, as it were) in order to elude the categories of history and of literary classification, of literary criticism, and of all kinds of philosophy and hermeneutics. We are beginning to glimpse that the disruption of categories is also the effect of what was written by Mallarmé.[20]

To think of Stevenson as he stands in relation to the modern development of fiction is to think of a writer whose writing evades critical and historical classifications, and as one who outmanoeuvres, as a consequence of the nature of his work, any formal or systematic category. The romance of Stevenson, like the poetry of Mallarmé, disconcerts the critic's capacity to regulate or register anything definite about its *place* in 'the canon'. It is a form of romance, as we have seen, that eludes description and, in creating effects 'for which we may never perhaps have a direct name', may continue to elude our descriptive faculties and repeatedly disrupt them. In a comparable way, it could be said of Stevenson that he introduces, to appropriate the

term used by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, a 'pagan' vitality into his writing, a term which coincides readily with Stevenson's admission of the Arboreal impulse and his idolisation of the nature god Pan:

> Postmodern (or pagan) would be the condition of literatures and arts that have no assigned addressee and no regulating ideal, yet in which value is regularly measured on the stick of experimentation. Or to put it dramatically, in which it is measured by the distortion that is inflicted upon the materials, the forms and the structures of sensibility and thought.[21]

Similarly, with Stevenson, we find a form of fiction with no regulating ideal other than that of a primal irregularity, whose value, precisely, can be measured according to the distortion it inflicts on the materials, the forms and the structures of sensibility and thought within which it operates. This is not to say that Stevenson in some way initiates a post-Modern development, but that he is one among others who makes such a development possible: he stands in relation to post-Modernism in the same way that Mallarmé does, not as one who announces but as one who provokes its advancement. More than anything, if the testimonies of Nabokov, Borges and Calvino are anything to go by, Stevenson plays a significant role in the emergence of romance as a form which is capable of acting outside of the terms by which Frye describes it. Stevenson apprehends, explores and to a large extent explains the conventional model described by Frye; but, acting prior to Frye, he dismantles it through the theoretical and practical application of romance as a modern idiom. And if Frye, in describing, has sought to inscribe this model as an institutionalised one, it is apparent, through Stevenson, that his efforts have been resisted prior to being made.

Notes

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, in Rivkin and Ryan (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, p. 359.
[2] Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*, p. 46.
[3] Norquay (ed.), *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction*, p. 5, with reference to 'Victor Hugo's Romances', *Familiar Studies*, p. 8.
[4] Stevenson, 'Victor Hugo's Romances', p. 8.
[5] Stevenson, 'Victor Hugo's Romances', p. 6.
[6] Stevenson's claims are extraordinary but not as odd as we might think. We have already seen, through Poe, how one romance writer has formulated certain scientific principles which, unconsidered in his day, were later ratified within the context of Einsteinian theory. George Levine, meanwhile, has talked of 'this peculiarly complex and even counterchronological interpenetration between science and literature' (*Darwin and the Novelists*, p. 3); and, in illustrating the point, refers to Stephen G. Brush's example: 'An idea from culture may enter science, where it can stimulate certain lines of theorizing and (perhaps) suggest new experiments and lead to new discoveries. This was what happened with the romantic concept of the unity of all natural forces'. Stephen G. Brush, *The Temperature of History* (New York: Burt Franklin and Co., 1978), p. 1. Stevenson, of course, takes these remarks to their ultimate conclusion in positing romance as the *avant-garde* of scientific discovery.
[7] Stevenson, 'Victor Hugo's Romances', pp. 7 - 8.
[8] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 81.
[9] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 7.
[10] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 9.
[11] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 11.
[12] Duncan, *Modern Romance*, p. 9.
[13] Robin Gilmour, *The Novel in the Victorian Age: A Modern Introduction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), p. 179.
[14] Jorges Luis Borges, 'Borges and I', in Rankin, *Dead Man's Chest*, p. 2.
[15] Rankin, *Dead Man's Chest*, p. 216. See also Vladimir Nabokov's essay, 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', in *Lectures and Literature*, ed. F. Bowers (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), pp. 179 - 205.
[16] Calvino, *Our Ancestors*, p. vii.
[17] See 'The Cloven Viscount', the first of three novellas in Calvino's *Our Ancestors*.
[18] Abrams, *Glossary*, p. 135.
[19] It is worth pointing out that Stevenson tends to have been more warmly received outside of a Scottish or English literary context (Borges is Argentinean, Nabokov is Russian / American, and Calvino is Cuban / Italian). The same is true, even, within the context of Modernism. One of a brood of Modernist movements in post-revolutionary Russia, for example, *The Seraphim Brothers*, consisting of writers like Viacheslav Ivanov, Mikhail Zoschenkov, and Evgeny Zamyatin, stressed in their manifesto the enduring value of Stevenson at a time when, in Britain, he was being thoroughly disparaged:

> We consider that the Russian literature of our times is amazingly pompous, prim and monotonous. We are allowed to write stories, novels and tedious plays - in either an old or new style - but they must without fail reflect the day-to-day environment and they must above all be on contemporary themes.
>
> The adventure novel is a harmful phenomenon, classical and romantic tragedy - an archaism or an empty exercise in stylistics, mass market stories are immoral. Therefore: Alexandre Dumas (the Elder) writes tripe; Hoffman and Stevenson are writers for children.
>
> But we consider that our brilliant patron [Hoffman], creator of the unlikely and the fantastic, was the equal of Tolstoy and Balzac, that Stevenson with his tales of robbers was a great writer and that Dumas was a classic on a par with Dostoyevsky. Mikhail Zoshchenko, *Stories of the 1920s* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. ix.

In the latter stages of the Modernist period, Stevenson receives a commendable mention from Walter Benjamin, a thinker of impressive magnitude whose influence perforates more widely today than ever. In his appraisal of Russian fabulist Nicholai Leskov, in the essay 'The Storyteller', Benjamin remarks: 'The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story. This is the basis of the incompatible aura about the storyteller, in Leskov as in Hanff, in Poe as in Stevenson. The storyteller is the figure in which the righteous man encounters himself'. See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Suffolk: Fontana / Collins, 1973), p. 109.

[20] Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Writing*, Derek Attridge (ed.), (New York and London, Routledge, 1992), pp. 111 - 112.

[21] Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 16.

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